

Oxford Australia Word of the Month

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Goodoo – *noun* a Murray cod.

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Goodoo

The story behind the Word of the Month

The Murray cod (*Maccullochella peelii*) is a native fish that is now listed as ‘threatened’, although when the term first appeared in 1843 in the *South Australian News* the fish were clearly very common: ‘So plentiful are the Murray cod that the men at the station merely throw out their lines in the evening and the next morning they find them full.’

The Murray cod is not a ‘cod’ in the European sense, where the cod is a fish of the genus *Gadus*. The European name has simply been transferred to the Australian fish as a result of some perceived similarity. Some indigenous names for the Murray cod were recorded in the early period, although they did not become widely known. *Ponde* (or *pondi*) was the name for the fish in the Yaralde or Ngarrindjeri language spoken around the mouth of the Murray River, and this word has some regional use in South Australia.

There is another indigenous name for the fish that has slightly wider usage. In 2009 a writer in the *Weekly Times* comments: ‘Murray cod go by a few different names, including greenfish and **goodoo**. The latest

name comes from a Fisheries Victoria newsletter which asks readers: Did you know “ponde” is an Aboriginal name for Murray cod?’ **Goodoo** appears in the *Canberra Times* in 2006: ‘the odd cod has been around the redfin schools at times, with more than one angler getting a big green **Goodoo** surprise while targeting redfin on a light rod.’

The word appears in the title of Robert G. Barrett’s 1998 novel *Goodoo Goodoo*. One hundred years earlier, in 1898, **goodoo** appears in K. Langloh Parker’s *More Australian Legendary Tales*: ‘“I did not mean to spear you”, said Durroon. “I thought it was a big **goodoo**.” ’

Goodoo is the word for Murray cod in the Kamilaroi Aboriginal language of northern New South Wales and southern Queensland, and is a reminder that though the fish is now associated with the Murray River, it exists in waters that are part of the Murray-Darling river system. Increasing use of the word **goodoo** is evidence that there is a strong interest in reintroducing indigenous names for Australia’s flora and fauna.

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