

# PLATYPUS

Platypus are among the most iconic of Australia's native animals, despite most of us never having seen one; except on screens (Header image: Klaus, Flickr).

## Background

Platypus inhabit a coastal strip along the east coast of Australia and down into Tasmania. There is also a small introduced population on Kangaroo Island in South Australia.

As Australia's population grows, it is important to ensure that our ecological footprint doesn't reduce that of the platypus. They can only survive in healthy river ecosystems, where they primarily eat insects but will also eat shrimps, snails, worms and even crayfish.

Threats to platypus are both direct and indirect. Direct threats include:

1. Fishing. Platypus will eat the kind of bait that many anglers use, so can be caught, or can drown by being entangled in line.
2. Unsupervised dogs and cats can and do kill platypus.
3. Discarded plastic, particularly rings of the right size to get wrapped around a platypus body can and do kill platypus
4. Platypus can be sucked into unguarded inlets on irrigation pumps and mini-hydroelectric generators.
5. General household, farm and industrial waste can disrupt ecosystems by poisoning animals which platypus eat.

More indirect threats include anything which leads to clearing of river bank vegetation and appropriation of river ecosystems. This can be population sprawl or lifestyle choices that increase habitat appropriation needed to support those lifestyles. For example, during recent decades, all of the rivers feeding into the waters along the Great Barrier Reef have witnessed clearing, mostly to support an expansion of the cattle industry<sup>1</sup>. The same choices that have been disastrous for the reef are also degrading platypus habitat. Hamburger eaters are probably aware that cattle are killed to supply the meat, but may not be aware of their involvement in reef destruction or platypus deaths.

<sup>1</sup><https://terrastendo.net/2014/04/03/are-cows-killing-the-reef/>

<sup>2</sup><https://platypus.asn.au/deaths-in-yabby-traps-rakali-and-turtle-images/>

## Yabby traps

While people don't hunt platypus, they do hunt yabbies and yabby traps can and do kill platypus. Often called *opera-house* traps, these not only kill platypus, but also rakali<sup>2</sup>, a native rodent, and fresh water turtles.



*A pair of platypus killed in traps near Canberra, Photo: ACT Environment Directorate.*

## Policy

The indirect threats to platypus are dealt with in the Animal Justice Party (AJP) policies on diet and population. In particular, our food policies allow us to halt and reverse our appropriation of wildlife habitat even if Australia's human population increases.

## Key Objectives

1. Establish school education programs to explain the threats to platypus and what to do about them.
2. An immediate ban on yabby traps. In particular, this implies a ban on the *sale* (not just the setting) of any type of trap that has the potential to kill platypus.