

Australian Lungfish under threat!

Contributed by Administrator
Tuesday, 10 August 2004
Last Updated Wednesday, 02 April 2008

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The Australian or Queensland lungfish, a 'living fossil' has existed unchanged since the time of the dinosaurs. Fossils show that the Australian lungfish was alive as it is today already during the Cretaceous, alongside the dinosaurs. This probably makes it the oldest living vertebrate species. At that time it was much more widespread than it is today. Now it only occurs naturally in the Mary and Burnett rivers in SE Queensland.

The Queensland Government's surprise decision (5 July 2006) to proceed with a very large dam on the Mary River threatens the survival of one of the most scientifically important animals on earth. The Queensland Government's surprise decision (5 July 2006) to proceed with a very large dam on the Mary River threatens the survival of one of the most scientifically important animals on earth. Throughout most of its length for most of the year, the Mary is nothing more than a small, meandering coastal creek but it is uniquely important as habitat for several of the country's endangered species. One of these is the Australian or Queensland lungfish, a 'living fossil' that has existed unchanged since the time of the dinosaurs. Of all living fish groups, the lungfish are the closest relatives of the land vertebrates – the amphibians, reptiles, birds and mammals, including ourselves. Lungfish were abundant 400 million years ago, during the Devonian (the 'Age of Fish') but have now dwindled to only three kinds, respectively living in South America, Africa and Australia. The South American and African forms are weirdly modified larval-looking creatures, but the Australian lungfish is still very similar to those ancient fish that gave rise to the first land vertebrates. It is thus uniquely important to scientists studying the origin of land animals.

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