

Native Freshwater Fish in the Wellington Region

Have you seen our native fish?

The rivers, streams, lakes and wetlands of the Wellington region are home to at least 20 species of native fish. Some are shown here. Many are small, nocturnal and hard to see, so look carefully when you visit your local stream.

Many native fish migrate between freshwater and the sea

During the famous whitebait run in spring, the young of five different fish species swim upstream from the sea to spend their adult lives in rivers and streams.

At the end of their lifetime, longfin eels migrate downriver to the sea and swim all the way to Tonga to breed.

 16 fish species migrate

There are less of our native freshwater fish than there used to be

Water pollution, habitat changes and overfishing are some of the reasons native fish populations are declining. Another reason is barriers in streams (such as dams, culverts, weirs and fords) that prevent fish from migrating. These barriers stop fish from completing their lifecycle or reaching the habitats they need.

 11 fish species are in decline

Structures that people build in streams, like this weir, can stop fish from moving upstream

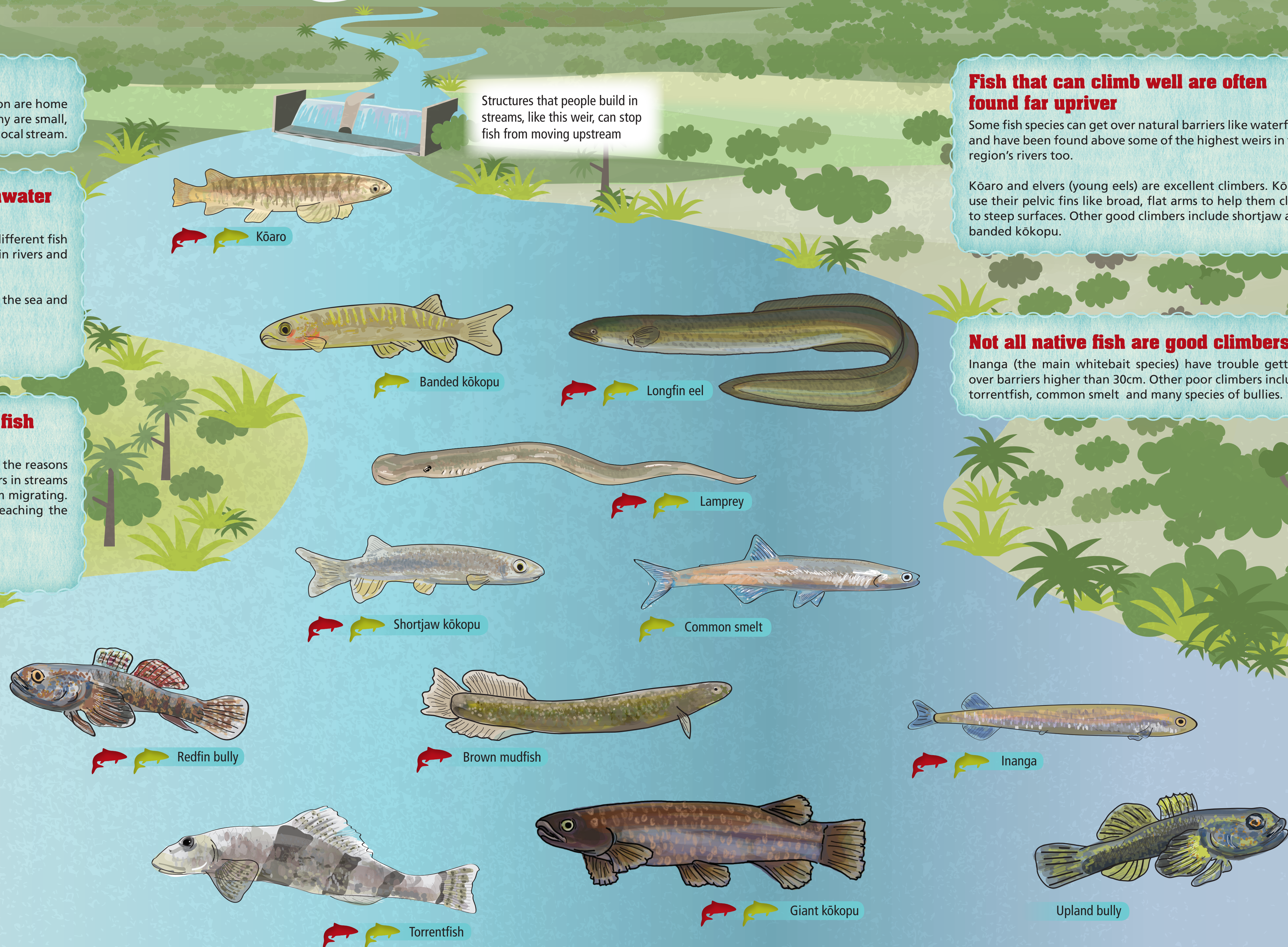
Fish that can climb well are often found far upriver

Some fish species can get over natural barriers like waterfalls and have been found above some of the highest weirs in the region's rivers too.

Kōaro and elvers (young eels) are excellent climbers. Kōaro use their pelvic fins like broad, flat arms to help them cling to steep surfaces. Other good climbers include shortjaw and banded kōkopu.

Not all native fish are good climbers

Inanga (the main whitebait species) have trouble getting over barriers higher than 30cm. Other poor climbers include torrentfish, common smelt and many species of bullies.



For more information about native fish and how you can help them, see www.gw.govt.nz/freshwater-fish

