River restock points towards a net gain

Scott Coghlan

COULD it be that summer prawnning in the metro area is finally making a comeback?

There has been a concerted effort to restock western school prawns in the Swan and Canning rivers in the last couple of years.

Refishwest, in conjunction with Fremantle’s Challenger Institute of Technology, has been behind the restock, which has been funded by recreational fishing licence money and supported by the Fisheries Department, the Swan River Trust, Murdoch University and the WA Fish Foundation.

It has been a steep learning curve, but the aim has been to make the prawn fisheries in the Swan and Canning rivers viable again – and it seems the effort could already be starting to pay rich dividends.

There was a time when dragging a prawn net through the shallows on a hot summer’s night was a Perth institution.

The banks of the rivers would be dotted with gas lamps as hundreds of draggers pored over their hauls, separating the prized prawns from small crabs, fish, blowies and weed.

I’ll never forget the nervous apprehension I used to experience each time I had my turn on the deep end – a legacy of being frightened witless by seeing *Jaws* as a youngster.

We used to keep enough for a good feed of prawns and the rest would be used that night as live bait for bream.

It’s been two decades since prawning was popular, but Paul Tuckwell was pleasantly surprised when he tried his luck in the Canning River last weekend.

Paul likes to try his hand at prawning each year, and usually does OK, but noticed a real improvement this time around.

Rather than dragging, Paul and his wife, Erin, used a scoop net and an LED headlamp to catch a lovely feed of prawns.

As he moved through the shallows the eyes of the prawns showed up clearly in the light. What most impressed him was the average size of the prawns, which he said was up significantly on the last couple of years.

Perhaps it’s time to drag the old prawn net out of the darkest corner of the back shed, patch up the holes and try your luck again.