

# New Native Fish Discovered in Mackenzie Country

New Zealand has a new freshwater fish species, according to the Department of Conservation in Twizel. The fish appears to be a galaxid, the family to which whitebait belong. It was found during a freshwater fish survey in the high-country Mackenzie Basin of inland South Canterbury.

A freshwater fish specialist, Dr Bob McDowall of the National Institute of Water and Atmosphere, was called on for his expert opinion and visited the site to collect specimens.

‘They definitely seem like something new,’ he says. ‘They are so different it is almost unbelievable! I am fairly certain they are a distinct species, belonging to the genus *Galaxias*.’

DoC staff were surveying for freshwater fish on a local

property when they made the discovery. Among their catch of the usual native bullies were a number of small, most unusual-looking fish.

‘When I first saw the fish I thought wow! These are something really different!’ recalls ranger Simon Elkington. ‘I’ve surveyed freshwater fish in most of the Mackenzie Basin but I’ve never come across anything like these before.’

The most distinctive features of the fish are their unusually rounded snout, large eyes and very tiny pelvic fins when compared with alpine galaxias, a species present in the nearby Ahuriri River. There are also many other differences that distinguish them from known species of fish.

If DNA evidence confirms that the fish are a new species,



BOB MCDOWALL

A yet unnamed fish discovered during a freshwater fish survey in the Mackenzie Country, a high-country basin in inland South Canterbury. Experts believe the fish is a galaxid, part of a group of fish which includes the whitebait.

they will be formally named and described. Further surveying will be necessary to clarify their distribution, as they may also be present in adjacent swamps and streams.

New Zealand has around 35 species of native fish. Galaxids are New Zealand’s most

common group of native freshwater fish, and the best known are those that go through a whitebait stage and spend part of their lives in saltwater.

— Source: DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION

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