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OPINION

Why eat farmed Murray cod? Let me count the reasons



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It's the fish that ate Australia. Take a look at any premium menu and you will see Aquana Murray cod. Technically freshwater perch, it's highly valued for its pale, white flesh, firm texture, clean, sweet flavour and relatively high fat content.



SIMON LETCH

Chefs also value it because it is farmed in ponds in the Riverina harnessing the latest technology and science and has one of the lowest environmental footprints of any farmed fish – if fish were able to leave footprints, that is.

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I mourn the passing of Murray cod caught in the wild, and will never forget having it at Melbourne's Flower Drum in the late 1980s. Steamed Cantonese-style with ginger and spring onions, it was incredibly rich and fatty, especially if you were honoured by founding owner Gilbert Lau and given the tailpiece on the bone.

I knew from my first bite that its mouth-filling richness would become a benchmark taste by which all other fish would be measured. What I didn't know was that it would soon be a threatened

species.

So I embrace the farmed Murray cod because I never want to feel that guilty again, and because it tastes so bloody good.

It's at its best in the hands of pioneering fish chef Josh Niland, who made it the focus of his [Charcoal Fish takeaway](#) in Sydney's Rose Bay, where whole cod are hung in the on-view cool room like beef carcasses. His menu uses every scrap and scale, from Murray cod wings to hot potato rolls stuffed with fish, fish crackling, fish stuffing and fishbone gravy.

It's a great species to cook at home, too, because it's pretty much up for anything, and hard to ruin by overcooking. The easiest way is to buy fillets, dry them off a bit, and pan-fry them skin-side down until crisp.

Next, I want to try grilling in paperbark, like Lennox Hastie at Sydney's [Firedoor](#), or over coals with wilted warrigal greens and bacon, as at [Matilda](#) 159 Domain in South Yarra.

It's not cheap, but then it's not farmed in order to bring the price down. It's farmed in order to raise the quality and standard of sustainable aquaculture and to ensure that great fish will still be around for our children to enjoy. If that's the price we have to pay, here's my money.

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