

Media release

From the Office of the Environmental Monitor

Wednesday, 27 May, 2009

YARRA RIVER FISH SAFE TO EAT AFTER DREDGING

The first study of contaminant concentrations in fish since dredging began has confirmed fish from the lower Yarra River are still safe to eat.

Victoria's independent Environmental Monitor Mick Bourke today said the results from the *2009 Lower Yarra River Fish Study* confirmed the Channel Deepening Project assessment finding that there were no likely health risk concerns for recreational anglers from the dredging of contaminated sediment.

"The study found that the contaminant concentrations in fish sampled from the lower Yarra River were generally lower than the concentrations recorded in 2006 and were below the guideline levels for Australian Food Standards," Mr Bourke said.

"The contaminant concentrations of arsenic, copper and zinc in the fish were lower than the 2006 results and lead and mercury were no greater than the concentrations recorded in 2006.

"The concentrations of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) were lower than the 2006 results, while contaminant concentrations of agricultural pesticides in the fish were no greater than the 2006 results."

Mr Bourke said the results meant the current conservative health advisory for people who caught fish from the lower Yarra and Maribyrnong Rivers would not change.

"While it is safe to eat fish caught from these rivers, recreational anglers are still advised to limit themselves to four serves of fish a month and one serve of eel a month, and children and women of child bearing age should limit themselves to one serve of fish a month and should not eat eels caught from the lower Yarra and Maribyrnong Rivers," Mr Bourke said.

The *2009 Lower Yarra River Fish Study* was conducted by EPA Victoria. The study sampled fish from the lower Yarra River in January and February 2009 to check if the contaminant concentrations had significantly changed since the previous study in 2006.

Eighty black bream from the lower Yarra River were analysed for the same contaminants tested in previous fish studies including heavy metals such as copper, arsenic and mercury and organic chemicals such as agricultural pesticides and PCBs.

"Fish are an important part of a healthy diet and the *2009 Lower Yarra River Fish Study* results are good news for recreational anglers," Mr Bourke said.

"The results allow anglers to continue to make informed and confident choices on the fish they catch and eat from the lower Yarra River."

Mr Bourke said the results, which were comprehensively examined by experts, were also subject to strict quality assurance checks.

"The results were analysed by a group of independent experts with specialist knowledge in human health, contaminants and eco-toxicology," Mr Bourke said.

"The Independent Expert Group was satisfied that the results from the study were scientifically valid."

He said the Yarra River and its catchment had a long history of industrial, agricultural and urban activities, similar to any other major world city.

“These activities have led to contaminants being recorded in the river sediments and in the fish that live in the Yarra River,” Mr Bourke said.

“Over the past decade, the lower Yarra River has increasingly been used for recreational activities including fishing. The community’s interest in the concentrations of contaminants in fish that may be caught and eaten from the lower Yarra River has led to studies being undertaken.

“The approval of the Channel Deepening Project in December 2007 required the inclusion of a monitoring program to examine contaminants concentrations in fish from the lower Yarra River.

“A further study in 2011 will build on the 2005, 2006 and 2009 studies,” Mr Bourke said.

For more information on the *2009 Lower Yarra River Fish Study* or to view the results visit:
www.oem.vic.gov.au.

Today Mr Bourke also said that the latest report from the Turbidity Monitoring Program showed low turbidity across all Port Phillip Bay monitoring sites last week.

-ENDS-