



Media Release

Tuesday, July 5th, 2011

NEW SEAFOOD SAFETY STUDY FOR THE TAMAR

NRM North, through the Tamar Estuary and Esk Rivers (TEER) Program, is embarking on a new seafood safety study for the Tamar estuary.

The study looks specifically at the consumption of intertidal wild oysters and recreationally targeted finfish in the estuary.

It will quantify the levels of metal contaminants accumulated in the oysters and finfish and compare these with the Food Standards Australia New Zealand guidelines.

TEER Project Officer, Monique Thompson, said the collection of oysters and finfish would run in collaboration with the University of Tasmania.

"The target shellfish species is the pacific oyster which is abundant along the intertidal zone of the Tamar estuary and is recreationally harvested." Ms Thompson said.

"The target fish species are flathead, flounder, cod and bream which are recreationally targeted and possess behaviour qualities that increase the susceptibility to metal accumulation."

The study is being run in conjunction with the Department of Health and Human Services. Rio Tinto and Van Diemen Aquaculture will assist with oyster collection.

Five of each fish species will be collected from three zones in the Tamar estuary, which equates to a minimum of 60 fish of legal size.

Pacific oysters will be collected from eleven sites which have been chosen according to public access areas and industrial bays.

"Finfish length, weight and age data will be collected, along with a 20g flesh sample. Oysters will be shucked, weighed and frozen in the Australian Maritime College laboratory before being sent to Analytical Services Tasmania for analysis." Ms Thompson said.

NRM North's Chief Executive Officer, James McKee, said it had been several years since a similar study was carried out in the Tamar estuary.

"The last study of this kind was conducted in 2002 on behalf of the Department of Health and Human Services.

"It is important to have recent science supporting any health recommendations associated with Tamar seafood consumption.

"This study will also assist in collecting data for the investigation into the black spot phenomenon affecting flathead which is of interest to the commercial and recreational fishing sector." Mr McKee said.

Sampling will run from July until September and the data will then be analysed.

A final report is expected by March next year and a public awareness campaign, including signage, brochures and other communication initiatives, will run in April/May.

The TEER Program is a partnership between NRM North, the Tasmanian Government, Launceston City Council, Meander Valley Council, West Tamar Council, George Town Council, Northern Midlands Council, Ben Lomond Water and Hydro Tasmania.

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