

**Minister for Natural Resources
Minister for Primary Industries
Minister for Mineral Resources**

MP106/1029

(Stamped 1 Jun 2006)

Mr Phillip Ingram
President
Anglers Action Group (Sydney Northside) Inc
PO Box 630
NARRABEEN NSW 2101

Dear Mr Ingram

Thank you for your letter of 18 February 2006, concerning dioxin levels in fish from Port Jackson.

I appreciate your support for the action taken by the NSW Government in response to this matter. The decision to close the port to commercial fishing and the current buyout of commercial fishers was not taken lightly and was only made after the risks to human health were taken into consideration.

A total ban has been placed on all commercial fishing in Port Jackson as a precautionary measure after test results on bream and prawns revealed elevated levels of dioxins in prawns and bream across the harbour. This ban on commercial fishing now includes fishing for bait.

I recently announced a \$5.8 million package that includes buying out commercial fishing businesses, further testing for dioxins in the fish and a public information campaign to advise recreational fishers and the community about the risks of eating seafood caught in the port.

I note your concerns with regard to a potential shift in commercial fishing effort to other areas such as the Hawkesbury River. The conditions of the buyout offer preclude those fishers who accept the buy out offer from re-entering either the Port Jackson Prawn Trawl Fishery (currently closed) or Region 5 – Metropolitan of the Estuary General Fishery for five years. However, if it becomes safe to harvest fish from Port Jackson in the future, fishers who accepted the buyout will have first option to return.

I have subsequently approved a second round of buyout offers and arrangements to formulate the re-entry option, which are expected to result in more fishers accepting the

offer. The outcomes of the buyout are being carefully monitored to minimize the risk of displaced fishing effort.

Dioxins are a group of chlorinated chemicals that originate from industrial pollution or are generated in natural processes such as bushfires. A national study by the Australian Government as part of the National Dioxins Program found that levels of dioxins in our food, our bodies and the environment are generally low when compared internationally.

Dioxins are chemically stable and can stay in the environment for a long time as well as accumulate in the body fat of animals and humans. Residues of dioxins in seafood caught in Port Jackson are likely to have their sources in contaminated sediments on the bottom of Homebush Bay. Current levels are likely due to many years of industrial activities. For further information on dioxins you may wish to view the Expert Panel report on the NSW Food Authority website at www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au

I am advised that, historically, there has been some testing of fish from Port Jackson, in particular from Homebush Bay and the upper Parramatta River. The results of studies undertaken by the then State Pollution Control Commission in 1989 led to fishing closures upstream of the Gladesville Bridge. Further studies have been undertaken since this time but while the results of these studies do not differ substantially from the recent testing results, it is the internationally accepted maximum residue for dioxins in food that has decreased. The decision to close Port Jackson was based on these new lower allowable levels.

Further testing of fish in Port Jackson is currently underway. The next round of testing results has been received and the preliminary data shows that species such as Yellowtail, sand whiting, kingfish, luderick and trumpeter whiting are showing levels below the 6 picograms per gram recommended by the expert panel.

While there is to be further extensive testing of the fish in Port Jackson, these early results are encouraging and point to lower results in some recreationally important fish species.

Yours sincerely

IAN MACDONALD MLC