Q. CAN I EAT FISH FROM THE SWAN CANNING ESTUARY?

A. YES!

This is one of the most common questions the community asks about the Swan Canning estuary. The Department of Parks and Wildlife, together with the Department of Health and Department of Fisheries, has investigated this question for metal and organic contaminants in Black Bream and produced guidance for the safe consumption of this important recreational species caught from the estuary.

Why Black Bream? Black Bream are the most commonly caught species of fish in the Swan and Canning rivers. They have a high potential to accumulate contaminants as they are long lived, complete their entire life cycle within the estuary and feed close to the estuary bed.

What was done? 32 Black Bream were collected from throughout the Swan Canning estuary in June and July 2013. The fillets from these fish were tested for a comprehensive suite of known contaminants in the estuary.

What was found? Of all the metal and organic contaminants tested, only a small subset were detected in the fillets at very low levels that are known to be safe for human consumption. In fact, you would need to eat at least 56 meals of Black Bream every month over your entire lifetime for these low levels to increase your risk of illness.

That’s a lot of fish! Normal consumption of fish in Australia is about two meals per month.

Decreasing risk of illness

Protective risk level (1 in 100,000)

Risk level for Black Bream tested from Swan Canning estuary (1 in 468,727)

The study also showed that none of the contaminants detected increased the risk of developing cancer over a lifetime beyond a level considered protective of human health (1 in 100,000 people). On this basis, eating Black Bream caught from the estuary presents very little risk to recreational fishers.

For more information, contact the Department of Parks and Wildlife Rivers and Estuaries Division on (08) 9278 0900 or rivers.info@dpaw.wa.gov.au, or the Department of Health on (08) 9388 4999 or ehinfo@health.wa.gov.au

Please note, this consumption guidance does not account for exposure to contaminants from other sources or relate to other fish species, such as blowfish, that are unfit for human consumption due to natural toxins.