

CONTAMINATION INVESTIGATIONS FOR THE MARIBYRNONG RIVER

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The Maribyrnong River has had a long history of industrial and port activities and is at the bottom of a catchment with a large urban population. Since the 1970s, much has been achieved to improve the quality of the Maribyrnong River, including stopping industrial discharges to the river, improving sewerage management and a range of other actions.

This community information publication provides an update about two detailed studies that will provide more information about the condition of the lower Maribyrnong River. The first study is an overarching environmental audit of the lower Maribyrnong River, lower Yarra River and Stony Creek Backwash. The second study is a comprehensive assessment of contaminant concentrations in fish from the Maribyrnong and Yarra river estuaries.

ENVIRONMENTAL AUDIT

In November 2005 EPA Victoria appointed Dr Peter Nadebaum of GHD Pty Ltd to conduct an overarching environmental audit of the risk to the lower Maribyrnong River, lower Yarra River and Stony Creek Backwash from the industrial processes, activities and wastes on the land described as the 'Whitehall Street Yarraville precinct' outlined in the map below. The 'Whitehall Street Yarraville precinct' is namely:

- Port of Melbourne Corporation land in Yarraville and at Holden Dock
- Orica land in Yarraville
- Mobil Yarraville Terminal land
- Albright and Wilson land
- CSR land including Sugar Australia.

The audit, a statutory process pursuant to section 53V of the *Environment Protection Act 1970*, will build on the work EPA has required of these companies in the Yarraville area to assess and clean up contamination that may impact on the river.

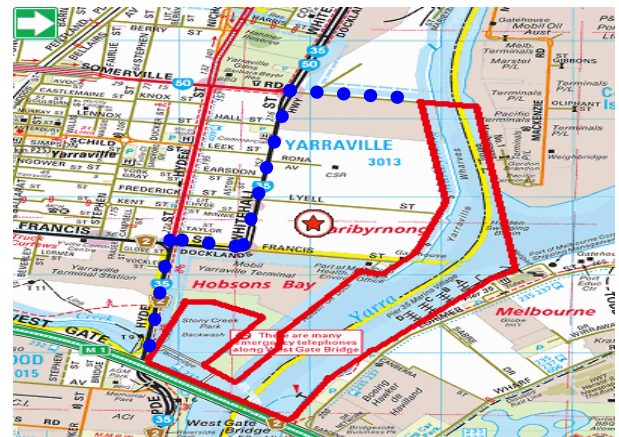


Figure 1: Segment of waters being audited (red) and associated 'Whitehall Street Yarraville Precinct' land (blue).

The audit includes review of existing information from the audit area, assessment of this information, and preparation of the audit report.

Further information about the audit can be found on EPA's website, www.epa.vic.gov.au.

Recommendations from the environmental audit report will be made public. The audit is expected to be completed in July 2006.

FISH STUDY

A 2005 pilot study conducted by EPA and Melbourne Water found contaminant levels in fish (such as bream) from the Yarra and Maribyrnong rivers were below the recommended Maximum Residue Limits in food. The study also found some eels from the Yarra River near Herring Island with levels of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs, a class of organic chemical) above the Maximum Residue Limits in food.

Victoria's Chief Health Officer advised that, while not a cause for alarm, the results warranted further investigation and, pending the outcomes of this work, recommended that eels taken from the Maribyrnong and Yarra estuary should not be eaten more than once a month.

To further investigate concerns raised by the pilot study EPA – with the support of Melbourne Water, Port of Melbourne Corporation and the Department of Human Services – is undertaking a more comprehensive assessment of contaminant concentrations in fish from the Maribyrnong and Yarra rivers.

Fish tissue will be analysed for persistent organics and metals listed in the US guidelines for fish advisories, as well as contaminants detected in the pilot study. Results will be compared to US EPA guideline values and relevant Australian food

standards. The results of this work are also expected to be available in July 2006.

FURTHER INFORMATION

If you would like further information about either of these studies please contact Gary Laidlaw of EPA's West Metro region on 9695 2560.

RELATED INFORMATION ON EPA'S WEBSITE

Maribyrnong and Yarra river investigations via the Hot Topics link at www.epa.vic.gov.au

EPA Publication 1038, *Fish and Eel Contamination Investigation for Yarra and Maribyrnong Estuaries*, April 2006.