

Shoalhaven River: PFAS investigations

Precautionary dietary advice

Key points

- The NSW Government has released precautionary dietary advice for fish caught in the Shoalhaven River after testing found per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) in some species.
- Residents can continue to fish in the Shoalhaven River but should follow precautionary dietary advice when eating their catch.

What are PFAS?

PFAS are a group of manufactured chemicals that include perfluorooctane sulfonate (PFOS), perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) and perfluorohexane sulfonate (PFHxS).

Due to their fire retardant, waterproofing and stain resistant qualities, these chemicals were widely used in some types of fire-fighting foams and other industrial products worldwide. PFAS can also be found in low concentrations in many consumer products like food packaging, non-stick cookware, fabric, furniture and carpet stain protection applications, clothing and shampoo.

The most common and prevalent sources of PFAS in the environment is where fire-fighting foams were used for training purposes, particularly on Department of Defence bases and at fire-fighting training facilities.

PFAS are very stable chemicals that do not easily break down and can persist in the environment.

Products containing PFAS are being phased out around the world.

Are PFAS a health risk?

The Australian Government's PFAS Expert Health Panel, in its report to the Federal Minister for Health, noted there is no current evidence to suggest an increase in overall health risk related to PFAS exposure. However, the Expert Panel also said health effects cannot be ruled out at this time.

Because the risks are not fully known, the NSW Government takes a precautionary approach to limiting people's exposure to PFAS. This includes occasionally providing precautionary advice to help limit people's exposure to PFAS. The EPA is leading the PFAS Investigation Program to understand the prevalence of this emerging contaminant in NSW. This program will help NSW be better prepared to respond if any health and environmental impacts become known.

The Expert Panel's report and a factsheet providing more information on PFAS and human health is available at www.health.gov.au/pfas.

Why was testing undertaken in the Shoalhaven River?

PFAS investigations are being undertaken at locations across NSW where there has been significant historical use of PFAS containing fire-fighting foams. These investigations are looking at the extent of the impact of PFAS, and the potential risks to the community.

The NSW Environment Protection Authority is investigating the source of PFAS contamination in the Shoalhaven River.

What is known so far?

Investigations have found varying levels of PFAS in some fish species upstream of the Nowra Bridge (Princes Highway), and in others downstream of the Nowra Bridge.

Other species that were tested, but do not require precautionary dietary advice are Yellowfin Bream, Bass, Perch and School Prawn.

Can I still fish in the Shoalhaven River?

Yes. You can continue to fish in the Shoalhaven River. Please note that existing advisories and restrictions are in place for other areas of the Shoalhaven River, and can be found at

- Independent of the site-specific advice related to PFAS above, pregnant women and women planning pregnancy should see the following fish consumption advice published by Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) relating to mercury www.foodstandards.gov.au/consumer/chemicals/mercury/Pages/default.aspx

Can I still eat fish I catch from the Shoalhaven River?

Yes. You can continue to eat fish from the area however, regular consumers should follow the precautionary dietary advice below to minimise their exposure to PFAS.

Please note, the advice below is if one single species is eaten per week. Eating multiple species would result in a greater exposure. For example, a child eating fish caught upstream of the Nowra Bridge would exceed the precautionary dietary advice if they ate three serves of Luderick and one serve of any other species listed in the table in a week.

Recommended maximum weekly intake for species caught upstream of the Nowra Bridge (between Nowra Bridge and Meadow Creek)		
Species	Servings per week*	
	Children (2-6 years old)	All other age groups
Silverbiddy	1	3
Dusky Flathead	2	4
Sea Mullet	3	5
Luderick	3	6
Sand Whiting	5	#
Mulloway	5	#

Recommended maximum weekly intake for species caught downstream of the Nowra Bridge		
Species	Servings per week*	
	Children (2-6 years old)	All other age groups
Dusky Flathead	3	#
Mulloway	5	#
Silverbiddy	5	#
Sea Mullet	6	#

*Adult Serving size = 150 grams; Children Serving Size = 75 grams.

Note:

- # - No dietary advice is required based on the reported PFOS and PFHxS concentrations. Concentrations were below the adopted trigger values in the samples analysed.
- Consumption of offal in all species should be avoided.
- Species specific information is for when a single species of fish is eaten per week. Eating multiple species would result in a greater exposure. For example:
 - 3 serves of Luderick and 2 serves of Dusky Flathead (caught upstream of the Nowra Bridge) in one week would exceed the recommended PFAS intake.
- General fish and seafood consumption advice states that people should eat 2-3 serves of fish and seafood each week as part of a balanced diet.

Can I still sell the fish that I catch in the Shoalhaven River?

Yes. The NSW Government has assessed the results of this sampling and has advised that local commercial fishers can continue to sell fish harvested in the river. This fishery remains open.

Where can I find more information?

More information on the NSW Government's response to PFAS can be found at www.epa.nsw.gov.au/pfas.

If you have any questions or concerns, call the 24/7 NSW Environment Line on **131 555**.