

## **Information Background: Human Health Focus Group for Oregon Fish Consumption Rate Project**

### **Human Health Focus Group**

You have been nominated to serve as a member of the Human Health Focus Group for the Oregon Fish Consumption Rate Project. The primary role of this group will be to provide an independent scientific review of a) risks associated with consuming fish as it relates to Oregon's current human health criteria in the water quality standards and b) fish consumption studies and local risk assessments associated with the consumption of contaminated fish. The work will help inform a number of policy options for increasing Oregon's fish consumption rate as applied in the human health criteria of the water quality standards.

### **Background on Oregon Fish Consumption Rate Project**

Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), partnering with U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, is reviewing the fish consumption rate used in deriving the human health criteria of the State's water quality standards. This process may result in a revision to the fish consumption rate utilized in calculating the human health criteria. It is recognized that there are multiple factors which affect the types and amounts of toxics within fish tissue. While all of these factors are important and should be addressed in looking to reduce toxics in fish, the Oregon Fish Consumption Rate Project will focus on a review of the fish consumption rate used in water quality standards.

In reviewing the fish consumption rate, the three governments are holding a series of facilitated workshops open to the public. Goals for the workshops are:

- Provide a forum for participants to identify critical issues, discuss implementation challenges and propose alternative actions.
- Develop recommendations and supporting documentation to present to the Oregon Environmental Quality Commission (EQC) with (1) a range of options to increase the fish consumption rate and (2) options for pollution control strategies that can help reduce the risks associated with consuming contaminated fish and decrease the toxic levels present in fish.

### **Developing Final Recommendations for the Oregon Fish Consumption Rate Process**

Reviewing the fish consumption rate involves complicated policy questions. It also involves identifying and analyzing the feasibility and potential impacts of the various options. At the completion of this process, DEQ will present the EQC with the policy questions, options, and recommendations based on the information gathered through the public workshops and focus groups. At that point, it will be the EQC's decision to recommend an option for rulemaking.

## Goals of the Human Health Focus Group

Two key questions in reviewing the fish consumption rate are:

- “Considering the human health criteria within the water quality standards- to what extent are populations who consume more than the current fish consumption rate (17.5 g/day) used in the standards at a greater risk for health impacts?”
- “Considering existing water quality conditions and contaminants in fish, what are the existing risks to high fish consuming populations in Oregon?”

We are asking the Focus Group to review the following pieces of information in order to answer these questions:

1. **“Considering the human health criteria within the water quality standards- to what extent are populations who consume more than the current fish consumption rate used in the standards (17.5 g/day) at a greater risk for health impacts?”**
  - *Tasks:*
    - Review Oregon’s current human health equation and how risk is calculated in this process;
    - Given the current criteria, explain what, if any, health risks higher fish consuming populations face with the current human health criteria as compared to those who consume at or below 17.5 g/day;
    - Discuss the differences between estimating cumulative toxicity vs. chemical specific toxicity.
2. **“Considering existing water quality conditions and contaminants in fish, what are the actual existing risks to high fish consuming populations in Oregon?”**
  - *Tasks:*
    - Review existing risk assessments based on actual tissue data;
    - Summarize findings from the risk assessments specific to potential impacts on higher fish consuming populations;
    - Identify risk driving chemicals;
    - Identify the uncertainties and assumptions in these studies.

## Products from Focus Group Meetings

The staff working to aid the Focus Group will attend and take meeting notes that will be reviewed/approved by the Focus Group members. The staff will then use these meeting minute notes to develop draft versions of documents addressing the two Focus Group questions. These draft documents and presentations will be circulated among the Focus Group members for review and comments before finalizing any products.

The goal of the staff will be to produce the following:

1. A document and presentation discussing how risk is considered, how it is considered in the human health criteria, and what this means to people who consume more than 17.5 g/day of fish:
  - Discuss what risks, if any, individuals who consume more than 17.5 g/day, face under the current water quality standards (based on 17.5 g/day);
  - Discuss the differences in how risk is calculated on a chemical specific level vs. cumulative chemical exposure level.
2. A document and presentation discussing the existing risks higher fish consuming populations face in light of existing risk assessment studies of actual fish tissue data:
  - Summarize the potential risks for various fish consuming populations in light of the fish tissue data;
  - Identify the risk driving chemicals;
  - Discuss the assumptions and uncertainties of these studies.

### **Tools to Aid the Focus Group**

To help the Human Health Focus Group meet its goals and the Planning Team to develop the products within the short timeframe, the following tools are provided:

- Planning Team members to take meeting minute notes which will be reviewed and finalized by Focus Group members;
- Strawman “Ground Rules” for meeting process and conduct;
- Identified list of fish consumption rate studies to be used by the Focus Group;
- Specific fish contaminant risk assessment studies to review.

### **Time Commitment**

We anticipate 3 meetings that will last from 2-3 hours each between May and June. The last two meetings will require around 1-2 hours of preparation time each. There are also two public workshops that Focus Group members should attend: May 16<sup>th</sup>, Lincoln City and (tentatively) July 17<sup>th</sup>, Portland. The May 16<sup>th</sup> meeting workshop will include a discussion of the policy questions associated with revising the fish consumption rate and fish consumption rate studies throughout the Pacific Northwest. The second workshop (tentatively July 17<sup>th</sup> in Portland) will include a presentation of the findings of the Focus Group. The workshop will be a 6 hour commitment for at least half the members. Finally, there will be phone and email communication from now until July.

### **Travel Compensation**

Oregon DEQ does have a small budget to compensate the travel costs of focus group members who attend the public workshop in July.