Advice for people who catch and eat fish in this waterway

Available information on the levels of mercury reported in fish from the Loddon River, between Bridgewater and Laanecoorie, indicates that carp and redfin in this area have slightly elevated levels of mercury.

In line with the recommendations of the Food Standards Australia New Zealand Consumer Advisory Statement that relates to fish with elevated mercury levels, carp and redfin caught from this area of the Loddon River should therefore be consumed:

- no more than once per fortnight (and no other fish that fortnight) for pregnant women, women planning pregnancy, and young children (up to six years of age).
- no more than once per week (and no other fish that week) for the general population.

Mercury in fish

All fish contain small amounts of mercury. In most fish, the levels are very low; however some varieties contain high levels of mercury due to their feeding habits or surrounding environment.

Commercially sold fish that may contain high levels of mercury include shark (flake), billfish (swordfish, broadbill and marlin), and orange roughy.

In freshwater environments containing mercury, some species of fish may contain high levels of mercury. This is more likely in fish that are predatory (eat other fish) and also live a long time in this environment.

As part of a healthy diet, everyone is encouraged to eat fish, in line with Food Standards Australia New Zealand recommendations. Fish are high in protein and other essential nutrients, low in saturated fat and contain omega-3 fatty acids.

Where is mercury found?

Mercury occurs naturally and in very low levels in rocks and soils. It may also occur in some soils and waterways as a result of historical gold mining activities where mercury was used to recover gold from mined, crushed rock. The Loddon River has been associated with historical gold mining.

Tests by the Environmental Protection Authority has found elevated levels of mercury in riverbed sediments in this area and, as a result, some fish – carp and redfin – caught in this area have been found to have slightly elevated levels of mercury.

Who should limit their intake of fish containing high levels of mercury?

The developing brain is sensitive to the effects of high mercury exposure. Therefore, it is important that pregnant women, women planning pregnancy, and young children (up to six years of age) limit their weekly intake of fish varieties known to contain high levels of mercury.

Food Standards Australia New Zealand provides advice on the number of serves of different types of commercially-sold fish that can be safely consumed. This information is available at http://www.foodstandards.gov.au/consumer/chemicals/mercury/Pages/default.aspx
Which fish in the Loddon River downstream of Laanecoorie Reservoir to Bridgewater contain elevated levels of mercury?

The following fish are likely to contain elevated levels of mercury:

Common Name/s: **European Carp**

Common Name/s: **Redfin (English Perch)**

The stretch of the Loddon River where these fish are likely to be caught is marked in red on the map below.
How much of these fish can be eaten from this location?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advice* for:</th>
<th>Number of serves</th>
<th>Fish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pregnant women, women planning pregnancy and young children (up to six years of age)</td>
<td>No more than one per fortnight and no other fish that fortnight</td>
<td>Redfin and Carp from the Loddon River: Downstream of Laanecoorie Reservoir to Bridgewater.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rest of the population</td>
<td>No more than one per week and no other fish that week</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One serve:  
For an adult = 150 grams (e.g. two frozen crumbed fish fillets)  
For a child up to six years of age = 75 grams (e.g. three fish fingers)

*In line with the Food Standards Australia New Zealand Consumer Advisory Statement that relates to fish with elevated mercury levels.

Can I drink the water in the Loddon River?

Untreated river water can contain a range of contaminants, including bacteria and viruses that may cause illness. It is therefore recommended that people do not drink untreated river water, regardless of its source.

For people living along rivers where a town drinking water supply is not available, rainwater collected from the roof is recognised as the most reliable and safest way to source drinking water.

Bush campers should carry in water for drinking. Alternatively, untreated river water needs to be boiled before drinking or use for cooking.

Is it safe to drink tap water supplied by the local water authority?

Yes. Coliban Water provides the local drinking water for people to drink in this area. Samples of this drinking water supply are regularly tested, and all mercury levels are well below the health-based Australian Drinking Water Guideline value.

Next steps

Further testing of other species in this part of the Loddon River is being considered by the Department of Health & Human Services.

For further information:

Fishing in Victoria

Mercury in fish and eating fish during pregnancy
Food Standards Australia New Zealand: [www.foodstandards.gov.au](http://www.foodstandards.gov.au)
NSW Food Authority: [www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au](http://www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au)

Mercury and your health
If you are concerned about your own health or your family’s health, see your local doctor.

For general information about drinking water quality or the potential health effects of chemicals contact the Environmental Health Unit (Department of Health & Human Services) on 1300 761874.