

**Submission  
No 20**

**INQUIRY INTO KOORAGANG ISLAND ORICA  
CHEMICAL LEAK**

**Organisation:** Department of Primary Industries

**Date received:** 7/11/2011

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Department of  
Primary Industries

Office of the Director-General

DGPO11/620

**-7 NOV 2011**

The Hon Robert Borsak MLC  
Committee Chair  
[oricainquiry@parliament.nsw.gov.au](mailto:oricainquiry@parliament.nsw.gov.au)

Dear Mr Borsak

**Select Committee on the Kooragang Island Orica Chemical Leak**

Thank you for your letter dated 13 October 2011 inviting NSW Department of Primary Industries Fishing and Aquaculture to make a submission to the inquiry.

Attached is our submission to assist your Inquiry.

Yours sincerely

**RICHARD SHELDRAKE  
DIRECTOR GENERAL**

## Select Committee on the Kooragang Island Orica Chemical Leak

Submission to the Inquiry from NSW Department of Primary Industries – Fisheries and the NSW Food Authority

- (b) the New South Wales Government's response following the incident:
- (ii) the actions of government departments and agencies once notified,

### NSW DPI – Fisheries and NSW Food Authority

*11 August 2011*

The NSW Food Authority (the Authority) was contacted by Hunter New England Population Health in the afternoon of 11 August 2011. Hunter New England Population Health approached the Authority via the agency's contact centre helpline. The nature of the enquiry was to seek information about oyster harvest activity in the Hunter River. The call was transferred to a senior food safety officer within the Authority's Shellfish Program.

Hunter New England Population Health were advised (over the phone) that the oyster industry in the Hunter River was closed following a large oil spill about a year ago and farmers had removed all stock. Consequently, no oysters from the Hunter River were in the market.

Hunter New England Population Health indicated that there had been a chemical spill, sodium chromate containing hexavalent chromium, in the area on 8 August. The Authority informed Hunter New England Population Health that there was some commercial prawn trawling activity and that information about spill size and location would assist in determining if fishing restrictions were required. The Authority recommended that the fisheries area within the Department of Primary Industries also be informed as restricting commercial and recreational fishing was within the remit of NSW DPI - Fisheries.

The Authority contacted NSW DPI - Fisheries to inform them of the incident and the potential impact on the prawn trawl fishery in the area. The Authority also requested the name of a contact person.

*12 August 2011*

NSW DPI - Fisheries provided the name of a key contact and the Authority forwarded details to Hunter New England Population Health.

Hunter New England Population Health informed the Authority that environmental levels of chromium VI following the vapour spill were low and this indicated an overall low public health risk. These results were to be discussed further by an expert panel convened by NSW Health that afternoon. Hunter New England Population Health undertook to raise the subject of public health issues associated with the consumption of recreational or commercial fish catches with the expert panel.

Following the meeting of the expert panel, Hunter New England Population Health provided feedback to both the NSW Food Authority and NSW DPI - Fisheries. The

expert panel took the decision not to seek restrictions on recreational or commercial fishing in the river as a consequence of the chemical incident.

The Authority enquired if further testing was going to be undertaken. Hunter New England Population Health replied that no further tests were planned. There was no further action taken by the Authority or NSW Fisheries.

Comment:

The rapid notification to NSW DPI-Fisheries or the NSW Food Authority of a pollution event can assist in preventing or minimising any public health impacts arising from the consumption of seafood.

Recommendation:

1) Future emergency response arrangements include timely notification to NSW DPI - Fisheries and the NSW Food Authority. This would allow better management of: food safety issues; advice to aquaculture permit holders, recreational and commercial fishers; and better marine ecosystem management (e.g. aquatic habitats that may be protected or negatively impacted by clean up efforts).