Fishos concerned about mercury in barra

RESULTS from testing fish samples collected from the Daly River, taken as a precaution following the 2011 Boxing Day train derailment at the Edith River, and an uncontrolled discharge from the Mount Todd Mine in late 2011, show above average levels of mercury in Barramundi in the Daly River.

Fish were tested for a full set of trace elements rather than just the subset of chemicals associated with the spill events, those being copper, cadmium, arsenic and zinc, in an aim to determine if the two 2011 incidents had affected fish in the Daly River catchments or would lead to human health concerns.

In a statement the Department of Fisheries said the analysis found that for all but mercury, the amounts of fish that would “need to be eaten on a regular basis to reach health-based guidelines is well beyond what would be likely consumption amounts even for regular fish eaters” and said there was “no reason for locals or visitors to be concerned about the health of the fishery or the fish in it”.

But the Amateur Fishermen’s Association of the Northern Territory (AFANT) has called on the NT Government for additional and wider testing of fish in both the Daly River and other areas of the NT.

“While any elevated levels of mercury in fish are a concern it’s important that the community understands that the results are below the safe levels”, AFANT president and local fisherman Warren de With said.

“Barramundi are recognised as a higher risk species for the accumulation of mercury and simple precautions should be taken by high risk groups including pregnant women and children.

“From the national and international data on barramundi, larger older fish are more likely to have higher levels of mercury build up than smaller younger fish so AFANT’s key message of ‘let the big barra go’ is even more pertinent,” Mr de With said.

The passionate fisho said the Fisherman’s Association has also requested a catchment study of potential point sources in the catchment, including old mining sites that may be causing higher than expected mercury levels.

The Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code prescribes seafood that is sold commercially to be within a limit of 1mg of mercury per kilogram.

The median concentration found in barramundi across the year from the Daly River catchment was approximately 0.15mg/kg.

Fisheries Minister and Member for Katherine, Willem Westra van Holbeke, said the level of mercury found in the barras in the Daly River was “normal”.

“I am convinced, based on the scientific evidence that has been provided to me, that this is naturally occurring,” he said.

Other fish known to contain naturally higher concentrations of mercury accumulated from the environment include shark, tuna, billfish and orange roughy.

Daly River test results of Black bream showed that the analysed fish had accumulated levels of mercury well below any safety guidelines.

Town is gearing up to celebrate young people

WITH the theme ‘Be Active, Be Happy, Be You’ National Youth Week is shaping up to be an action packed event for Katherine’s youth and community groups.

Katherine Town Council along with youth service providers have been busy planning a full schedule of ‘exciting youth oriented activities’ from April 8 to 12.

Katherine Town Council Community Liaison Officer, Pam Franklin said all events are free and youth between the ages of 12 to 25 years are encouraged to attend.

Activities will start with an opening ceremony pool party, at the Katherine Town swimming pool on Monday April 8 from 4pm to 7pm.

Ms Franklin said the pool party was a celebration of youth in the Katherine Region and promised lots of great activities including swimming and the Commando Run, DJs, a fashion parade, a textiles competition, a photo booth and a dunk tank.

She said there will be a free BBQ and smoothies and lots of prizes and giveaways up for grabs.

Youth Week will also host two Skateboarding Australia workshops with a ‘Learn to Skate’ focus with coaches coming from the Darwin Hub on Tuesday April 9.

There will be two sessions from 10am to 12pm and 1pm to 3.00pm, where skateboards and helmets will be provided to all participants.

For the first time in Katherine, youth homes will come together to race couches on Wednesday 10 from 2pm to 5pm, and show the importance of raising awareness around Youth Homelessness.

Ms Franklin said 15 teams will decorate their couches for the big day, and will compete at a yet to be announced location for the first annual Couch Surfing Shield.

The YMCA will host a Drop In Night Disco on the Thursday 11, from 7pm to 11pm.

Youth Week’s closing ceremony will be capped off with a Battle of the Bands and Talent Quest competition at the Lindsay St Complex on Friday 12, from 5pm to 8.30pm.

Youth performers are encouraged to sign up, start practicing and get up on stage for a chance to win prizes.

Additional information and registration forms for the Closing Ceremony can be found online at www.ktc.nt.gov/Recreation-Events/Calendar/YouthWeek.