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NEW JERSEY UPDATES ADVISORY FOR CONSUMING LARGE BLUEFISH

(09/P11) TRENTON – The Department of Environmental Protection today announced a new recommendation for consuming large bluefish, a popular species commonly caught in Atlantic Ocean waters.

In coordination with the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services and agencies in six other states, the DEP updated its fish consumption advisories and is recommending that the public consume no more than one meal every other month (six meals per year) of bluefish larger than 24 inches. Previously, fish consumption advisories for large bluefish recommended four meals per year for most people.

Bluefish contain polychlorinated biphenyls at levels which may pose a risk to public health; the same health concern exists for another popular species, striped bass. Long-term exposure to PCBs has been shown to cause cancer and a number of other serious health effects, including damage to the nervous system of developing fetuses, the immune system and the reproductive system.

For bluefish smaller than 24 inches and for striped bass, state officials continue to recommend no more than one meal per month (12 meals a year) for most people. Also unchanged are the bluefish and striped bass consumption advisories for infants, children, pregnant women, nursing mothers and women of child-bearing age – a high-risk group that is advised to avoid eating any bluefish or striped bass caught in Atlantic coastal waters.

Officials in New Jersey and six other coastal states updated their fish consumption advisories based on the results of a multi-state study, which evaluated PCB levels in striped bass and bluefish from Maine to Georgia. Completed in 2008, the study also showed that bluefish and striped bass are not good sources of beneficial fish oils. Different from other fish, these two species have lower amounts of omega-3 fatty acids compared to the amount of PCBs they contain.

The other states -- Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Connecticut, Delaware and Maryland – also are issuing similar updates and instructing pregnant women, young children and other high-risk people to avoid eating striped bass and large bluefish. All others are advised to consume only moderate amounts of these fish.

Aggressive cleanup efforts and improved disposal practices have reduced PCB contamination in the environment, and a continued decline in PCB levels in fish is anticipated. In the meantime, the public is encouraged to enjoy more frequent meals of other types of marine and freshwater species, such as flounder, weakfish and trout.

For more information, visit New Jersey's fish advisory Web site at www.FishSmartEatSmartNJ.org.