



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20460

MAR - 7 2006

THE ADMINISTRATOR

Melanie Marty, Ph.D.
Chair
Children's Health Protection Advisory Committee
Cal/EPA, Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment
1515 Clay Street, 16th Floor
Oakland, California 94612

Dear Dr. Marty:

Thank you for writing to me on behalf of the Children's Health Protection Advisory Committee (CHPAC) about the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and U.S. Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) activities related to fish consumption advisories. You identified three areas CHPAC would like EPA to focus on as it works with FDA to develop the first annual work plan under the agencies' 2005 Memorandum of Understanding regarding contaminants in fish.

First, you requested that EPA, in collaboration with FDA, focus on implementing CHPAC's June 2004 recommendations. These advocated using current science and existing data to develop a clear public health message about the risks and benefits of fish consumption, focusing on women of childbearing age, children, and multiple contaminants, and on identifying additional major contaminants in fish. FDA and EPA are working together on targeted outreach of the 2004 joint advisory.

You also asked EPA to encourage FDA to increase fish contaminant monitoring and provide technical assistance in sampling design and analysis to improve the commercial fish contaminant database. FDA already has an on-going monitoring program and, on January 18, 2005, FDA's Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition made new data available on its fish advisory website about mercury concentrations in fish, including new data on tuna, cod, and other popular fish. We have informed FDA that we are receptive to collaborating to examine the sampling design and analysis programs to determine if improvements could be made, and to provide technical assistance.

Finally, CHPAC recommended that EPA commit to sustaining a comprehensive and integrated federal and state communication strategy and explore point-of-sale communication of fish risks and nutritional benefits. EPA agrees that coordinated messages with other governmental agencies are critical to ensuring uniform, consistent public information. As you know, the Agency works very closely with states, tribes, and other federal agencies on issues related to the

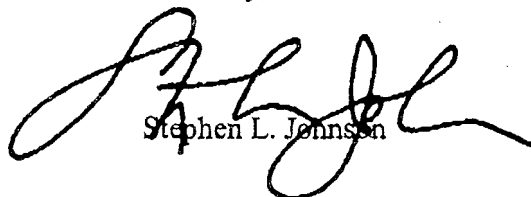
development and dissemination of public health messages about fish consumption. The 2004 joint FDA and EPA National Mercury Advisory references and incorporates state and tribal advisories to help reduce confusion resulting from multiple messages. I would also like to note that FDA, in cooperation with EPA, is currently conducting three surveys related to the effectiveness of the joint federal advisory on mercury in fish. We plan to consider the survey results before determining next steps toward changing our public communication strategy about fish risks and nutritional benefits.

You will recall from the February 2005 meeting between CHPAC and EPA's Office of Water that EPA and FDA want to consider the best current science as we evaluate the need for further federal action to address fish risks and nutritional benefits. Currently, we are awaiting completion of the Institute of Medicine (IOM) report on fish risks and nutritional benefits (expected by September 2006) before we make a decision about how to best move forward. EPA and FDA will also consider CHPAC's recommendations for inclusion in the 2007 joint EPA/FDA work plan after we have reviewed the IOM report. As always, we are constantly looking at the emerging science with regard to the risks and benefits of fish consumption, and are committed to ensuring that the correct balanced public health message be constructed based on current science.

EPA and FDA are committed to finalizing the joint 2007 work plan that the two agencies will use to begin addressing the goals and objectives identified in the 2005 MOU, and we are discussing the specific projects that both agencies can commit to undertake this year. If you would like EPA to provide CHPAC with an update on this effort, or if you have additional questions or concerns, please contact Benjamin H. Grumbles, EPA Assistant Administrator for Water, at (202) 564-5700.

Again, thank you for writing and for your interest in this important environmental health issue.

Sincerely,



Stephen L. Johnson