



## DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

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For Immediate Release

Oct. 14, 2005

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### DEQ, FDA take tissue samples from aquatic life in Lake Pontchartrain

BATON ROUGE, La. – In an effort to ensure that Lake Pontchartrain is recovering from the floodwaters of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, the Department of Environmental Quality and the Food and Drug Administration recently gathered tissue samples from aquatic animals caught in the lake.

The FDA divided the lake into 16 sectors and the two agencies covered the sections during a seven-day period. This effort will be repeated for five more weeks for the first phase of the seafood tissue testing project. Aquatic animals that people would likely eat, such as fish, crabs and shrimp, were caught and taken to an FDA lab. There, the tissue will be sampled to see if there are any effects to the species from the floodwaters that were pumped from the city into the lake. Eighty-seven samples, comprised of finfish, shrimp and crabs, have been delivered to the FDA lab in Atlanta for analyses.

“The thing I found most encouraging was the number of fish, shrimp and crabs that we caught,” said Chris Piehler, a senior environmental scientist at DEQ who participated in the sampling event. “Some of the shrimp were big enough where one could fit on a hot dog bun. Nice size speckled trout were found in the lake and black drum were plentiful, too.”

DEQ has thoroughly sampled the water in Lake Pontchartrain as well as the floodwaters that were pumped into the lake from the flooded areas of New Orleans. The department was encouraged by the results because the only contamination of concern was bacteria related to the waste that was in the floodwaters. As the water was pumped into the lake, the number of bacteria declined, diminishing to levels similar to those of unaffected areas. Because the volume of water pumped out of the city back into the lake was approximately 4 percent of the total volume of the lake, the floodwater quickly diluted into the lake.

The department also tested the toxicity of the floodwater throughout September using aquatic toxicity tests. The tests showed that all fish and 10 of 12 invertebrate test animals were able to survive in 100 percent pumped-out floodwater. Toxicity tests involve the exposure of aquatic animals to a series of concentrations of floodwater for 48 hours. High survival rates are an indication of the absence of pollutants.

“Based upon the large number of samples from the lake and floodwaters and because of the toxicity tests results, we do not foresee any issues with the fish, crabs, shrimp or any other animals that need the lake to live,” said DEQ Secretary Mike McDaniel.

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