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Letter of the Day | Catastrophic impacts of Rio Cobre pollution

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THE EDITOR, Madam

The reports of the series of occurrences of pollution in the Rio Cobre highlights a chronic and serious environmental crisis. It has broad implications for fishing, drinking water, and the overall health of communities that depend on the river. The river has experienced multiple fish-kills during the past two decades, each associated with some type of pollution, such as industrial effluent, sewage overflows, and stormwater runoff. These incidents not only kill aquatic biota, but also disrupt the occupation and well-being of individuals who depend on the river.

Fisherfolk along Rio Cobre bore the brunt of these events of pollution. Fish-kills happened in 2011 and 2021, wiping out humongous parts of aquatic flora and fauna, depriving the fisherfolk of their livelihood. The incident in 2022 where a rise in pH level caused fish and other creatures to perish shows the way pollution throws the river ecosystem out of whack; it's harder for populations of fish to recover. This not only impacts food security, but also contradicts the economic viability of fishing-dependent communities.

The pollution of the Rio Cobre also poses a serious threat to drinking water quality. Wastes, such as industrial effluents, sewage, and oil spills, introduce toxic chemicals and pathogens into the water, which render it impure for consumption. Populations that draw drinking water from the river are more likely to contract water-borne diseases, such as cholera and dysentery, as well as health risks in the long term from the toxic chemicals. The breakdown at the 2023 sewage treatment plant, for instance, likely injected hazardous bacteria into the water, amplifying health risks for downstream consumers.

