

Expert panel to meet over latest Murray algal outbreak

The Murray-Darling Blue-green Algal Bloom Advisory Panel set up last year by Commonwealth and State governments is to reconvene to discuss the worsening outbreak of bloom in the Murray River.

Murray-Darling Basin Authority Chief Executive Rob Freeman, said the panel would meet on Tuesday, 2 March.

It will be chaired by the Authority and include experts in water quality, river ecology, public health and animal health/toxicology and senior Commonwealth and state officials.

Mr Freeman said the panel would provide advice on the best and most appropriate response to the blue-green algae outbreak currently affecting the River Murray.

It would also consider the longer term implications of algal blooms based on experience with this bloom and with the similar bloom of 2009.

“The Panel will assist the Authority and State agencies as they work closely together on this latest growing outbreak,” Mr Freeman said.

“There are also longer term implications of recurring algal blooms which are best dealt with at a strategic level by the Panel.”

“While coordinated management arrangements for algal blooms are already in place at the regional level, the panel will explore whether any more can be done to address future management requirements in the face of continuing drought”.

A large part of the River Murray on the New South Wales and Victorian border is currently affected by algal blooms and the NSW Murray Regional Algal Coordinating Committee has issued several red alerts to date.

The affected water is not suitable for drinking and may cause gastroenteritis in humans if consumed and skin and eye irritations after contact.

It is most important that people avoid contact with water in the river in affected areas and follow advice from local authorities.

Media contact: Sam Leone, phone (02) 6279 0141

Panel Membership

Chair - Murray-Darling Basin Authority

Representatives from the Australian, NSW, Victorian and South Australian governments.

Additional experts

Dr David Cunliffe (water quality/human health) is the Director of the Environmental Health Service with the South Australia Department of Human Services. He has been a National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) representative on the Rural and Remote Water Quality Steering Group, and on the Northern Territory's Remote Community Water Management Project Reference Group. He currently chairs the Drinking Water Working Group, as a part of the development of the National Water Recycling Guidelines by the Environment Protection Heritage Council, the Natural Resources Management Ministerial Committee and the NHMRC.

Dr Terry Hillman (water quality/river health) was Director of the Murray-Darling Freshwater Research Centre from 1993 to 2001. He is a member of the Independent Sustainable Rivers Audit Group for the Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Council, and is an Adjunct Professor at La Trobe University. He has been a Board Member of the North East Catchment Management Authority since its establishment in 1997. He chairs La Trobe University's Regional Advisory Board and is on the Board of the Murray-Darling Association. He is also the independent Scientific Member of the Alligator Rivers Region Technical Committee.

Dr Chris Bourke (animal health/toxicology) is a veterinary toxicologist, recently retired from the position of Principal Research Scientist with the NSW Department of Primary Industries. Dr Bourke is a national and international expert on the effects of poisonous plants on livestock, with a particular interest in toxicoses that involve the central nervous system.

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