

Murray Regional Algal Coordinating Committee

Tuesday 23 February 2010

Red alert for Murray River extended to include Barham

Deputy Chair of the Murray Regional Algal Coordinating Committee (MRACC), Natasha Ryan, today said the 'red alert' for blue-green algae in the Murray River had been extended further downstream and now includes Barham.

"New sampling results have revealed the presence of high levels of potentially toxic blue-green algae in the Murray River from Hume Dam to Barham – half way between Moama and Swan Hill," Ms Ryan said.

"The latest results also indicate a red alert level for Gulpa Creek at Mathoura."

"Sampling has also shown Torrumbarry Weir, between Echuca and Barham, is on amber alert, but is likely to reach a red alert during the next week based on the latest results."

A 'red alert' level warning indicates that waters are unsuitable for recreational use or primary contact by domestic users and may also pose a threat to livestock and domestic animals.

Town water supply authorities have been informed and are treating town water supply with powered activated carbon for both NSW and Victorian consumers; however, raw water drawn from these areas should be avoided for all purposes.

"The species of blue-green algae identified are potentially toxic and may cause gastroenteritis in humans if consumed and skin and eye irritations after contact. Boiling the water does not inactivate algal toxins," said Ms Ryan.

Local residents and visitors should avoid any water that appears bright green, where obvious green scums are present, or a distinctive odour is noticeable. Blue-green algae are usually very obvious, appearing as clumps or specs in the water and are often associated with a strong musty or earthy odour.

People are advised not to enter the water, and are further advised not to drink untreated water or bathe in water drawn from the river whilst a red alert warning is in place.

Livestock owners are reminded to continue to check stock water supplies for blue-green algae and to remove stock from foreshores where surface scums are visible or blue-green algae are suspected.

There is some evidence that small quantities of algal toxins may enter fish flesh when a bloom produces toxins. Any fish caught in water affected by a bloom should be cleaned and washed thoroughly in uncontaminated water and any internal organs disposed of before consumption.

People should not eat mussels, crayfish or the internal organs of fish from red alert areas. Toxins might also taint fish flesh and when a bloom is toxic common sense indicates finfish should not be eaten.

Information updates about blue-green algae blooms and red alert areas can be obtained from the Regional Algal Coordinating Committee freecall Algal Information Hotline on **1800 999 457** or visit www.water.nsw.gov.au

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