

Murray Regional Algal Coordinating Committee

12 March 2010

Update on red alerts in the Murray Valley

Deputy Chair of the Murray Regional Algal Coordinating Committee (MRACC), Natasha Ryan, today updated the 'red alert' levels current for the Murray Valley.

"A red alert currently exists in the Murray River from Hume Reservoir to Moama and also for the river at Swan Hill. There is also a red alert for the Edward River from Deniliquin to Moulamein and for the Wakool River at Kyalite, as well as for the Mulwala Canal," Ms Ryan said.

However blue-green algal levels in the Murray River between Torrumbarry Weir and Barham, and in Gulpa Creek at Mathoura have decreased markedly resulting in Red alerts being removed from these locations.

Local rainfall may have decreased the blue-green algal presence in many locations, such as most of the Edward River, the Wakool River at Kyalite, in the Mulwala Canal at Finley and the Murray River at Swan Hill, however these locations remain on Red alert pending confirmation from next week's sampling.

However there is little evidence that last week's rain has affected blue-green algae levels in Lake Hume, Lake Mulwala or in the Murray River from Lake Hume to Moama.

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 are treating town water supplies with powdered 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.

Ms Ryan continued, saying that many parts of the Murray River are still safe for recreational water-based and land-based activities and holiday makers are advised to check with the local tourism authority.

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.

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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