

Barwon Regional Algal Coordinating Committee

2 March 2012

Blue-green algae high alert at Copeton Dam

The Barwon Regional Algal Coordinating Committee (RACC) has issued a red level warning (high alert) for blue-green algae at Copeton Dam, near Inverell.

Routine monitoring has detected high numbers of potentially toxic blue-green algae in Copeton Dam. The red level warning indicates that waters are unsuitable for recreational use or primary contact by domestic users and may also pose a threat to livestock.

In addition, people are reminded that a red alert warning at Pindari Dam, near Ashford, is still current.

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.

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 whilst a red level warning is in place.

Landholders at Copeton Dam are advised to remove stock from the foreshores as blue-green algae are known to cause stock illness or even death. Dogs are particularly susceptible as they ingest algae by licking their coats.

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.

This red level warning will remain in place until such time as the Barwon Regional Algal Coordinating Committee advises that it has been lifted. The NSW Office of Water will continue to provide updates from routine water monitoring of Copeton Dam.

Information updates about blue-green algae blooms and red level warning 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**