

Far West Regional Algal Coordinating Committee

7 February 2014

Red alert for blue-green algae in Darling River - Bourke

The Far West Regional Algal Coordinating Committee (RACC) has issued a red level warning (high alert) for blue-green algae in the Darling River located at the Bourke Boat Ramp and Bourke Weir.

This 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.

Blue-green algae is 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.

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 this red level warning is in place.

Boiling the water does not remove the toxins produced by the algae.

People 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.

As algal numbers can increase dramatically in a short time frame under the present environmental conditions, there may be algal blooms occurring in other sections of the Darling River which are not reported – personal discretion is advised.

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

Bourke's town water supply remains safe as Bourke Shire Council has commenced treating the water with Powdered Activated Carbon.

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.

This red level warning will remain in place until such time as the Far West Regional Algal Coordinating Committee advises that it has been lifted. Routine water quality monitoring of the Darling River is on-going.

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 **www.water.nsw.gov.au**

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