

# Blue Green Algae in the Murray River Questions and Answers

6 April 2009

## What is the current situation?

Routine monitoring by the New South Wales Department of Water and Energy has detected high numbers of potentially toxic blue-green algae in the Murray River between Hume Dam and Tooleybuc, west of Swan Hill. The lower Ovens River where its level is influenced by Lake Mulwala may also be affected.

The Department of Water and Energy has also increased sampling downstream between Torrumbarry Weir and Tooleybuc because of the likelihood of the bloom impacting on that part of the river. Current information on the status of the bloom can be obtained from the Regional Algal Coordinating Committee Algal Information Hotline on 1800 999 457.

## What is being done?

The Murray Regional Algal Coordinating Committee is continuing to monitor the water. Warning signs have been erected at key sites along the affected stretch of the Murray River to advise the public not to come into contact with affected water. Given the extent of the bloom, not all affected locations can be signposted; however locations between Hume Dam and Torrumbarry Weir are currently impacted. Current information on the status of the bloom can be obtained from the Regional Algal Coordinating Committee Algal Information Hotline on 1800 999 457.

## How might algae in the Murray River affect me?

The algae have been detected at levels that may cause gastroenteritis if consumed, as well as skin irritation, and respiratory and hay-fever like symptoms upon contact.

If you feel ill following contact with Murray River water, you should seek medical advice.

## Can I swim and undertake other watersports?

Swimming and water sports or activities, including waterskiing, which result in direct contact with affected water are not recommended.

## Can I use water from the Murray River within the home?

Untreated river water should never be used for human consumption. Boiling the water will not inactivate algal toxins. Affected river water will be unsuitable for domestic purposes, such as bathing and showering.

## Are town water supplies safe to drink?

Water suppliers have put in place treatment systems to manage risks from blue-green algal toxins to town drinking water supplies. Town drinking water supplies along affected sections of the Murray River remain safe to drink. If you have any concerns about the quality of your mains drinking water supply, contact your local water authority (Victoria) or your local council (New South Wales).



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### **What should I do if I come into contact with affected river water?**

If contact with affected river water does occur, users should remove any affected clothing and wash themselves thoroughly with clean water after coming ashore. Wetsuits should be thoroughly rinsed before being worn again to remove any traces of algae.

### **Is it safe for pets and other animals to access water from the Murray River?**

Dogs and other pets can also experience health effects through exposure to blue-green algae, so it is safer not to let them enter or drink water in affected areas of the Murray River.

Livestock owners are reminded to continue to check stock water supplies for blue-green algae and to remove stock from foreshores where blue-green algae may be present.

### **Can I eat fish, mussels or crayfish from affected areas of the Murray River?**

People should not eat mussels or crayfish from affected areas of the Murray River. Any fish caught should be cleaned and washed thoroughly in uncontaminated water and any internal organs disposed of before consumption.

### **Things to do and see in the Murray River region**

Contact the Victorian Tourism Information Service on 13 28 42 or visit [www.visitvictoria.com](http://www.visitvictoria.com) to learn more about what to do and see in the Murray region.

Alternatively contact a Visitor Information Centre in the Murray region to find out about accommodation, or get advice about local events and things to do.

### **Further information:**

Information updates about the blue-green algae bloom in the Murray River can be obtained from the Regional Algal Coordinating Committee Algal Information Hotline on 1800 999 457.

Further information can also be obtained from the Department of Water and Energy's website at [www.dwe.nsw.gov.au](http://www.dwe.nsw.gov.au) or Goulburn Murray Water's website at [www.g-mwater.com.au](http://www.g-mwater.com.au).

For further information on health issues relating to blue-green algae, contact the Victorian Department of Human Services on 1300 761 874, or NSW Public Health on 02 6080 8900.



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