

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **Changing algae status in the Murray**

Friday 17 April 2009

NSW Minister for Water Phil Costa today advised that the algae-outbreak in the Murray River is changing and reminded holidaymakers to check the Government's toll-free 1800 phone number for the latest information on affected waterways.

He said the phone hotline or Department of Water and Energy's website remains the best way to keep informed, with calls and webpage hits increasing sharply over the past fortnight.

"Large areas of the Murray remain on Red Alert and testing has shown it to be toxic. Avoiding contact with the water in these regions is advised," said Mr Costa.

"The good news is that the overall affected area has reduced from around 800 kilometres to 500 kilometres.

"The previous Red Alert for the mid Murray River that included Barham, Swan Hill and Tooleybuc has been lifted due to declining algae levels and the section of river from Torrumbarry Weir to Boundary Bend is now on a less severe amber alert."

The stretch of Murray River from the Hume Dam at Albury to Echuca/Moama remains on Red Alert. A new section of river further downstream at Euston has this morning also been placed on red alert and Gulpa Creek at Mathoura also remains on red alert.

The red alert for the Edward River has been extended to cover the entire river from Deniliquin to Moulamein and a section of the Murray River further downstream at Euston has this morning also been placed on red alert.

Mr Costa said since the recent outbreaks of blue-green algae along the Murray River nearly 2,500 calls were placed to the hotline in the first two weeks in April.

By comparison, just 67 calls were made to the hotline in the first two weeks of March – with a total of 540 calls for the entire month.

"This is an enormous spike in the number of calls, and shows people are aware of the potential risks and they are making sure they are properly informed," Mr Costa said.

The community is also seeking out information online, with the algal information page on the Department of Water and Energy's website becoming the most visited page excluding the home page.

"We anticipate the bloom will continue until the onset of cooler autumn weather but the level of alert at different sites may change," he said.

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“The bloom is being closely monitored by the Murray and Sunraysia Regional Algal Coordinating Committees who have implemented their respective contingency strategies including increased water quality sampling, analysis and reporting in cooperation with the NSW Department of Water and Energy.”

The Minister reassured travellers and residents that town drinking water supplies are being treated to manage risks from algal toxins and are completely safe to drink. Testing of all 16 water treatment plants along the NSW side of the river was undertaken earlier this week.

“I would like to remind residents or people travelling to or staying in remote areas to phone the toll-free number on **1800 999 457** for the latest advice on the algal situation,” he said.

More information is also available by visiting [www.dwe.nsw.gov.au](http://www.dwe.nsw.gov.au).

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