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Watch out for algae blooms this summer

With summer fast approaching all residents across NSW are advised to watch out for algal blooms this summer and to report any suspected blooms to their local water management authority or to the NSW Office of Water.

Like bushfires, blue-green algae blooms are a summer time hazard in Australia. The NSW Office of Water manages nine Regional Algal Coordinating Committees (RACCS) that constantly monitor algal levels in NSW waterways and coordinate responses to blooms as they occur.

NSW Water Commissioner, David Harriss said that algal cells are generally harmless at small numbers, but can affect human and animal health if toxic species are present at high concentrations.

“Algal cells are a natural part of aquatic ecosystems that are always present in the water in small, harmless numbers,” Mr Harriss said.

“These cells will multiply and grow, or ‘bloom’, when there is the right combination of environmental conditions, including high nutrient levels, warm water temperatures, sunlight and still water.

“People should keep an eye out for algal blooms, particularly blue-green algae, and adhere to ‘algal alerts’ issued by their local RACC or water management authority.”

Blue-green algae scums can vary from thick paint-like accumulations on water surfaces, to small green floating dots or a general discoloration of the water, and are generally associated with a strong musty or earthy odour. Boiling the water does not remove the algal toxins.

Mr Harriss said that the NSW Office of Water, in conjunction with local councils and RACC community volunteers, conducts routine monitoring of water quality in the State’s major dams, rivers and streams.

The NSW Office of Water has published a report reviewing the Office’s and Murray and Sunraysia RACCs’ management of an extensive blue-green algae bloom over 800 km long that occurred in the Murray River earlier this year (*photos available*).

“One of the major outcomes of the review was highlighting the importance of local and regional management of algal blooms and the Office will continue to support the RACCs to provide this critical role,” he said.

All water users are reminded to be cautious when entering any water body and to advise their local water authority or the NSW Office of Water of any suspect scums. Contact telephone numbers are available from the NSW Office of Water website: www.water.nsw.gov.au

For more information about blue-green algae and current algal alerts, please call the State’s toll free algal information line on **1800 999 457** or visit the NSW Office of Water website.

Media contact: Anne Brook 0419 120 527

Our news releases are on the web:
www.water.nsw.gov.au

