



Save the Murray

The Savethemurray Project Manager
Phone: +61 8 8226 4402 Email: info@savethemurray.com
PO Box 75 West Richmond, ADELAIDE SA 5033

Blue-Green Algae



Blue-green algae is a naturally occurring algae known as cyanobacteria. Blue-green algae is a commonly used term applied to several types of cyanobacteria that have similar characteristics. All cyanobacteria form a scum on the surface when present in large numbers. Algae are a natural part of the river system and might bloom when there is an increase of nutrients in the river and when river flows decrease. Blue-green algae blooms are an indicator that the river environment is out of balance.

When cyanobacteria breaks down it releases poisonous toxins and reduces oxygen levels in the water, causing stress and even death to other aquatic organisms, especially fish.

Why is it in the River Murray?

Blue-green algae occurs naturally in most waters, however it is normally present in low numbers. A combination of the following factors encourage algal 'blooms';

- High nutrients levels, especially nitrogen and phosphorus
- Low water flows
- Degraded aquatic ecosystems
- High light availability
- High temperatures

Impacts of Blue-green algae blooms

Blue- green algae blooms can cause many problems for users of River Murray water;

- Humans can suffer liver damage, stomach upsets, nervous system disorders, skin rashes and eye irritations
- Death and poisoning of stock, wildlife and domestic pets
- Water quality dramatically reduced
- Undesirable taste
- Bad odour
- Discolouration of water
- Unsightly and smelly scum
- Suffocation of aquatic plants and animals
- Disruption to water supplies
- Affects recreation and tourism
- Industries and agriculture are affected

What is being done?

The Murray Darling Basin Commission has developed an Algal Management Strategy that is based on whole catchment management. The strategy aims to reduce nutrient concentrations in streams and improve in-stream flows. Reducing nutrient loads in waterways is the most effective way to decrease the occurrence of toxic algal blooms. The careful use of fertilisers and detergents and diverting run-off away from main channels into wetlands that act as natural filters provides positive benefits to waterways and reduces the chance of toxic algal blooms.