

Welcome to the fourth edition of the Blue-green algae newsletter. It has been a busy off-season this year. The review of the BGA Framework has been completed, the circular for 2009-10 has been prepared and a number of workshops and meetings have been held by research agencies and water corporations.

GENERAL NEWS

Circular Update

The 2009/10 Blue-Green Algae Circular was released in early October. The Circular provides information on algal bloom coordination arrangements for Victoria.

The Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) has completed its review of the Blue-Green Algae Coordination Framework and has made some changes to the structure of the Circular. In particular the roles for all parties have been more clearly articulated.

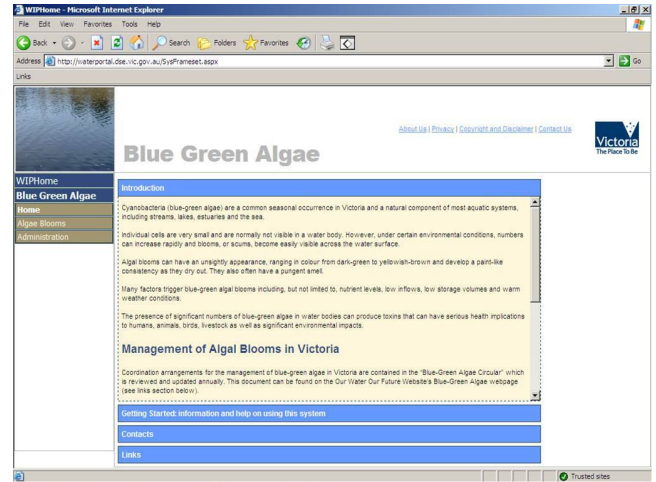
There have been two name changes since last season. The Convening Agency is now referred to as the Regional Coordinator. Also the Department of Human Services has had a restructure and the Environmental Health Section of DHS is now part of a new department, the Department of Health (DH).

With the blue-green algae season starting all local water managers should be familiar with these changes. The Circular and associated documents are located on the "Our Water Our Future" website. (<http://www.ourwater.vic.gov.au/environment/algae>).

NEW! Web based notification to DSE

DSE has released a web-based user interface ('portal') for blue-green algae. Local water managers should notify DSE of a bloom via this portal. This system will also automatically inform the user if a biovolume exceeds trigger values and if any additional notifications are required.

The notification forms are still available to use for this season. However we encourage you to use the new system as soon as possible.



The BGA web portal

The system requires a password to log-on, so if you are a Local Water Manager and would like access to the system please email bluegreen.algae@dse.vic.gov.au.

Regional Coordination Plan Update

Regional Coordinators are well underway in updating their Regional Coordination Plans for the season to reflect the changes in the 2009/10 Circular. Goulburn-Murray Water met with its local water managers in November, while DSE Gippsland, Barwon Water and Wannon Water have held meetings in December.

On the other side of the Murray River in NSW, the Murray and Sunraysia RACC's (Regional Algal Coordinating Committees) have also held their pre-season meetings.

National Guidelines Released for Comment

The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) in collaboration with the Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council (NRMCC) has released revised sections of the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines, and a discussion paper titled "Health Based Targets for Microbial Safety of Drinking Water" for public comment.

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The draft ADWG includes updates on cyanobacteria factsheets, including a proposed health guideline value for cylindrospermopsin (no guideline values have been proposed for nodularin or saxitoxins). The guideline value for microcystins remains as is currently specified in the ADWG (2004).

A copy of the draft is available from <http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/>. The closing date for comment is 15 January 2010.

PROJECTS & MEETINGS

National Cyanobacteria Workshop

A meeting in Sydney hosted by the NSW Department of Water and Energy, in association with NSW Health and the Sydney Catchment Authority was held on the 12-13 August 2009.

This meeting was very well attended with around 110 people representing water management organisations, government agencies and research groups from all States and Territories.

Presentations were delivered by thirty-three speakers who gave updates on recent events and issues, current research, monitoring, testing and treatment.

The abstracts of all presenters can be found on the Water Quality Research Australia website <http://www.wqra.com.au/Conferences.htm#cyano>

DSE and DH are investigating the possibility of holding another workshop next year in Melbourne. If your organisation is interested in assisting with the planning of such a meeting please email bluegreen.algae@dse.vic.gov.au.

Cyanosurvey: A National Update on Toxic Cyanobacteria and their Distribution

Water Quality Research Australia (WQRA) has commenced a project which will create a collection of national data linking the occurrence of toxic cyanobacteria (blue-green algae) to water quality preferences and genetic typing. This will



provide the basis for a greater understanding of why the distribution of blue-green algae changes. This study will also help predict future trends, and provide a benchmark for future studies.

Currently WQRA is advertising for a research officer for this project, with sampling in the southern states to start in late January.

A number of Water Corporations in Victoria are assisting by providing samples for this project. If you would like further information please contact Andrew Humpage from Water Quality Research Australia. (Andrew.Humpage@sawater.com.au)

September Workshop at Melbourne Water on Methods for Detecting Toxins in Blue-Green Algae.

Melbourne Water recently hosted a workshop to discuss a new method for testing if Cyanobacteria (blue-green algae) has the potential to be toxic. The method is called qPCR and it identifies if the genes needed to make toxins are present in the bloom.

As a result of the workshop Aaron Jex from the Veterinary Science Department at Melbourne University has indicated that they would like to undertake a two year project looking at the applicability of PCR and qPCR for toxin detection in the major blue-green algae species in Victoria. If your organisation would like more information or would be interested in participating in the project, please contact Aaron Jex of Melbourne University (ajex@unimelb.edu.au) or Judy Blackbeard of Melbourne Water (phone: 131722).

If anyone has any blue-green algae stories or tidbits of information, we are keen to hear from you. Please contact Louisa Davis on (03) 9637 9268 or via email: bluegreen.algae@dse.vic.gov.au

Wishing everyone an enjoyable and safe holiday season.