

# Gippsland Lakes Algae Situation

Factsheet 12 February 26 2021

## 'Do not eat shellfish' advisory still in place for the Gippsland Lakes

### What is the current situation?

The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP), in consultation with the Department of Health (DH) advises people not to eat shellfish, including mussels and other types of shellfish collected from anywhere in the Gippsland Lakes at this time. This advice is due to the ongoing poor water quality in the Gippsland Lakes and low levels of a potentially toxic algae, *Pseudo-nitzschia*.

Low levels of this algae are currently affecting some parts of the Gippsland Lakes at the Tambo River and Lake King, Metung. This type of algae can affect humans if they eat shellfish that have been in algae-affected water, causing gastroenteritis, nausea or vomiting. Proper identification of the algae can only be determined by laboratory analysis - samples have been sent to a laboratory for formal identification.

The poor water quality in the Gippsland Lakes system is due to sediment and other nutrients from the previous bushfires washing into the lakes system. Water quality can vary greatly especially during and after rainfall periods with debris and other contaminants entering the water. Contaminants can include harmful microorganisms such as bacteria.

The Gippsland Lakes contain many different types of algae at varying levels as part of the natural environment and balance of the Lakes system. Algae are a naturally occurring organism present in all waterways. The health impacts of algae can vary depending on the type of algae and the type of exposure. Some algae produce harmful toxins that can accumulate in seafood such as mussels.

Algae levels are currently low across the Lakes. However, because the levels and types of algae fluctuate in the Lakes system and because harmful toxins can still be present in some seafood such as shellfish even after a harmful algal bloom has disappeared, as a precaution people are advised to not eat shellfish.

For more information on harmful algal blooms refer to:

<https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/Harmful-algal-blooms>

### What is being done?

DELWP is working with DH to monitor the situation and keep people informed. Signs are in place across the Gippsland Lakes advising not to eat shellfish and we will keep people informed via the DELWP Water website:

<https://www.water.vic.gov.au/waterways-and-catchments/rivers-estuaries-and-waterways/blue-green-algae> and the DELWP Customer Service Centre on 136 186.



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## Can I swim and do other water sports in the Gippsland Lakes?

As a general rule, it is recommended not to swim or come into contact with water that has surface scum or looks murky. We are currently doing broad scale water sampling across the Lakes system to monitor algae levels. Algae can grow quickly in the right conditions and situations can change rapidly. The water quality in the Gippsland Lakes is poor at the moment due to increased nutrients and sediment from the bushfires. For further information on recreational water refer to <https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/water/recreational-water-health-hazards>