

Gippsland Lakes algae situation

Factsheet 6 30 July 2020

Potentially harmful algae in parts of the Gippsland Lakes

What is the current situation?

Algae are a naturally occurring organism present in all waterways. The Gippsland Lakes contain many different types of algae at varying levels as part of the natural environment and balance of the Lakes system.

High levels of a potentially toxic algae, *Pseudo-nitzschia* are currently affecting some parts of the Gippsland Lakes at Wattle Point, Duck Arm (west of Paynesville), Eagle Point and Lake King Jetty, Metung.

There are also high levels of a non-toxic but potentially harmful algae, *Synechococcus* species currently affecting some parts of Lake Wellington at Marlay Point and Roseneath Park.

Test results show that the amount of algae in these areas has reached levels where it is recommended for people not to come into contact with the affected water.

Fish within the Gippsland Lakes move throughout the Lakes system, so as a precaution any fish harvested from the Gippsland Lakes should have gills and guts removed prior to cooking. People should not eat whole fish, or shellfish.

How might the algae in the Gippsland Lakes affect me?

Direct contact with these algae can cause allergic reactions such as skin rashes or itchiness, sore eyes, ears and nose or if swallowed gastroenteritis, nausea or vomiting. Dogs are particularly susceptible to ingesting these algae if they swim in the affected water.

The potentially toxic algae, *Pseudo-nitzschia* can affect humans if they eat whole fish or 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, so samples have been sent to a laboratory for formal identification.

The public is warned not to eat shellfish collected from or near Wattle Point, Duck Arm, Eagle Point, and Lake King Jetty until tests confirm whether this algae is toxic. Fish harvested from anywhere in the Gippsland Lakes should have gills and guts removed prior to cooking. Do not eat whole fish harvested from the Gippsland Lakes.

What is being done?

The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) is working with the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to monitor the situation and keep people informed. Signs have been put in place at affected locations 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?

Yes – the areas where you should not come into contact with the water are at Marlay Point, Roseneath Park, Wattle Point, Duck Arm, Eagle Point and Lake King Jetty.

We are 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. As a general rule, it is recommended not to swim in or come into contact with water that has surface scum or looks murky.

What should I do if I come into contact with affected water?

After coming in contact with algal blooms or scum, shower or wash yourself down to remove any algal material. Wash and dry all clothing and equipment. Use of wetsuits for water sports may increase the risk of rashes, because algal material in the water trapped inside the wetsuit will be in contact with the skin for long periods. If you experience any health effects, whatever the nature of your exposure, you should seek prompt medical advice.

What is being done?

Monitoring and analysis of samples is being conducted on a regular basis to determine the type, amount and extent of algae present. If this species of algae is found at more sites, or other algae of concern is found, the public will be informed.

Signs are in place to warn people not to come into contact with the affected water or to eat shellfish from affected sites. Any fish harvested from the Gippsland Lakes should have gills and guts removed prior to cooking – do not eat whole fish.

How long will the algae last?

There is no definite length of time that these species of algae will remain in the Lakes. Once the testing shows the algae levels have changed the public will be notified.

For more information about algae in the Gippsland Lakes, contact the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning on 136 186 or for health effects go to www.health.vic.gov.au