



# News Release

18 February 2008

Department  
for Environment  
and Heritage

## Ewens Ponds algae no risk to public

Testing of water samples from Ewens Ponds has shown that the water poses no significant health risk to people diving or snorkelling in the ponds.

"We arranged for the water to be tested after a complaint from a local diver, who experienced itchy skin and sore eyes after a visit to Ewens Ponds," said Ross Anderson, District Ranger, Lower South East, Department for Environment and Heritage (DEH).

"The Department of Health examined the test results and confirmed that algal cell levels were low and of no concern in the clear water of the ponds.

"Contact with algae floating on the surface of the ponds may cause irritation in about 10% of the population, but the Department of Health said any irritation should cease once the person showers.

"We have placed a sign at Ewens Ponds advising visitors to avoid contact with any floating algae and to shower soon after leaving the water," Mr Anderson said.

Blue-green algae are present in almost all aquatic ecosystems, including creeks, rivers, lakes and wetlands.

During summer, it is common for numbers of algal cells to increase at Ewens Ponds, resulting in the algae becoming visible on the surface of the water.

"At this stage the decline in water quality appears to be mainly due to loss of flows and increased nutrient levels," Mr Anderson said.

"A technical reference group, which includes members from DEH, the South Eastern Water Conservation and Drainage Board, the Environment Protection Authority and the Department of Water, Land and Biodiversity Conservation, has been established to analyse the water quality problems at Ewens Ponds and determine how they might best be managed.

"We are also undertaking studies with DWLBC through the national water initiative to improve our understanding of the ponds.

"DEH will continue to monitor the water quality in the ponds and advise the community accordingly," he said.

Ewens Ponds is part of the larger Eight Mile Creek wetland system of which more than 90% has been developed for intensive agriculture.

The ponds are a groundwater-fed wetland ecosystem comprising three circular ponds and interconnecting channels that eventually lead to Eight Mile Creek and discharge about five kilometres downstream to the Southern Ocean.

Ewens Ponds is of national significance for nature conservation, providing habitat for the nationally threatened Ewens Ponds pygmy perch.

It is also an important site for recreational diving and snorkelling, with about 10,000 people visiting the ponds each year.

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