

# Blue-green algae bloom Wurdee Boluc Reservoir – FAQs – January 2024

## Is our drinking water safe to use?

Our customers can be assured that the drinking water supplied to their homes and businesses is treated to the highest quality in order to meet all health and safety guidelines and remains safe to drink.

## Will our drinking water be affected by the bloom?

Wurdee Boluc Reservoir is one of our region's surface water storages in the Barwon River catchment and is able to supply much of Geelong, the Surf Coast and Bellarine.

It, along with reservoirs in the Moorabool River catchment and water supplied by the Melbourne–Geelong Pipeline, make up Barwon Water's diverse Geelong–region supply system.

Over the summer months, we usually increase the supplies from the Moorabool system and the Melbourne–Geelong Pipeline to meet increased demand. We will likely use these sources more this summer so that we can manage the load on the Wurdee Boluc water treatment plant due to the increased amount of algae the filters need to remove.

The mix of sources does mean some customers may notice a change in taste in their water over the next few weeks.

This is to be expected, as different water supply catchments have unique taste profiles.

All the water supplied remains safe to drink and continues to meet regulatory standards.

## Is the bloom toxic?

The species in the bloom at the reservoir is non-toxic.

## What causes blue-green algae?

Blue-green algae occur naturally and grow in specific conditions, generally when there is sunny, still weather and elevated nutrient levels.

They are an important part of all water ecosystems, including creeks, rivers, lakes and wetlands.

Although it is not always visible, blue-green algae is often present in our reservoirs.

Under certain environmental conditions, algae can increase rapidly and bloom, becoming easily visible across the water surface. The blooms can range in colour from dark-green to yellow-brown.

There may also be an odour. Both the colour and smell are normal, natural indicators of blue-green algae.

## **How long do blooms last?**

It is hard to predict. However, blooms can start and end very quickly depending on climatic conditions and nutrient levels, as well as storage levels and water temperature.

A blue-green algae bloom will die off naturally.

Cooler, windy weather or increased flow may also reduce or stop a bloom fairly quickly.

## **What is Barwon Water doing about it?**

We are monitoring the reservoir daily and have increased our regular water testing.

We have installed infrastructure to help manage and control water quality within the reservoir.

As a precaution, we have also installed signage around the reservoir, advising visitors to avoid fishing.

Water from the reservoir will continue to be treated to the highest quality in order to meet safe drinking water guidelines before reaching homes and businesses.

Barwon Water will work with relevant agencies in accordance with the Blue-Green Algae Regional Coordination Plan if any further management response is necessary.

## **Is the untreated water in the reservoir safe to come into contact with?**

Contact with the water at our reservoirs is not permitted at any time, and because blue-green algae in the untreated water of the reservoir can cause mild skin irritation, we remind visitors to be extra aware of this restriction.

Visitors to reservoirs affected by blue-green algae should observe signage to avoid fishing or coming into contact with the untreated water in the reservoir.

Visitors can still enjoy birdwatching, walking, picnicking and other permitted activities at reservoirs affected by blue-green algae.

## **The reservoir is looking blue, why are the 'no fishing' signs still up?**

Algae levels can fluctuate rapidly and in accordance with the Victorian Government's Algal Management Framework, we require several consecutive algae results below recreational guideline levels.