

Blue-green algae bloom – West Barwon Reservoir Q and As – September 2023.

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 and always will be present in the West Barwon Reservoir.

Under certain environmental conditions, algae can increase rapidly and “bloom” or form scums which become 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.

When did you notice the bloom?

Barwon Water first became aware of elevated levels of blue-green algae in late February.

Since then, we have been closely monitoring the reservoir. Recent warmer, sunny weather had caused it to bloom.

How long will it last?

It is hard to predict. However, blooms can crash and explode very quickly depending on climatic conditions and nutrient levels.

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?

Barwon Water is monitoring the reservoir daily and has increased its regular water testing.

We have 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 all health and safety guidelines before reaching homes and businesses.

Barwon Water is undertaking monitoring in the Barwon River downstream of the West Barwon Reservoir and will work with relevant agencies in accordance with the Blue-Green Algae Regional Coordination Plan if any further management response is necessary.

Is the water safe?

Some species of blue-green algae produce harmful toxins which take effect when eaten, inhaled or skin contact is made. Contact with affected water can cause skin irritation, mild respiratory effects and hayfever-like symptoms.

Visitors to West Barwon Reservoir should avoid fishing while the blue-green algae are still present.

Contact with the water at West Barwon Reservoir is not permitted at any time, and because blue-green algae can cause skin irritation, we remind visitors to be extra aware of this restriction.

Visitors can still enjoy birdwatching, walking, mountain biking and picnicking at the reservoir.

Will our drinking water be affected?

Our customers can be assured that the presence of algae will not impact drinking water supplies or quality.

Some customers in Forrest may notice some slight changes to taste, however the water supply remains completely safe. Treatment processes at the Forrest Water Treatment Plant have been optimised to reduce or eliminate any potential taste impacts for customers.

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