



# Media Release

Date 24 May 2022 | Media contact: Ebony Battersby 0436 402 370

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## **Toxic Blue Green Algae impacting prawns caught offshore**

Prawns caught in the Gippsland Lakes and five nautical miles off the Gippsland coast between McLoughlins Beach to the New South Wales (NSW) border are not suitable for human consumption.

The toxins present in prawns are due to the blue green algae bloom currently impacting the Gippsland Lakes and parts of Ninety Mile Beach, as the bloom and prawns from the Lakes system run out to the ocean. Ingesting these toxins by consuming affected seafood can lead to serious illness.

Humans and pets should avoid contact with water at all parts of Lake King, Lake Victoria and where algae is visible along Ninety Mile Beach. Lake Wellington is the only site safe for human contact within the Gippsland Lakes system. Beach goers are urged to avoid contact with any area of water that appears discoloured, murky or has evidence of scum.

Fish caught from any part of the Gippsland Lakes and along the Ninety Mile Beach from McLoughlins Beach to Marlo should be gutted, gilled and washed thoroughly in fresh water prior to eating, cooking or freezing. Do not consume crustaceans (including prawns, crabs and pilchards) or shellfish harvested from this area. Freezing or cooking the seafood does not destroy the toxins.

Beyond Marlo to the NSW border, prawns may have travelled through bloom-impacted areas. As a result, a 'do not eat prawns' advisory is in place. Commercial harvesting of shellfish for human consumption from the Gippsland Lakes has been prohibited since March.

The Victorian red meat and seafood food safety regulator PrimeSafe has now informed seafood businesses to cease harvesting from up to five nautical miles along the coast between Corner Inlet and the NSW Border, until further notice.

"This is precautionary. But we have also recommended the three businesses that we know have been operating in the area engage with Food Standards Australia and New Zealand to recall product harvested between 1 April - 21 May 2022," PrimeSafe Chief Executive Officer Michael Coffey said.

Mr Coffey said PrimeSafe will be working closely with industry to ensure impacted seafood businesses are able to harvest again as soon as possible, bringing safe, Victorian produce to market.

"This bloom has been impacting upon the Gippsland Lakes for most of the year, taking a toll on tourism, the local economy and now, our local prawns," Incident Controller Peter West said.



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“This species of algae cannot survive in the ocean. As challenging as it is, we are hoping for a slow and steady dispersal of the bloom in the Gippsland Lakes to minimise the risk to fish and marine life.”

Please take note of signage at boat ramps, jetties and fishing spots or check the VicEmergency app for the latest information and advice.

Direct contact with toxic blue green algae can cause allergic reactions such as skin rashes or itchiness, sore eyes, ears and nose. Drinking algae-affected water or consuming food (such as fish, crustaceans or shellfish) containing toxins can lead to gastroenteritis, which can induce vomiting, diarrhoea, fevers and headaches. These toxins may also affect the liver or nervous system. If you are concerned for your health, consult your GP immediately.

If you do come into contact with contaminated water, wash immediately in fresh water and seek medical advice if experiencing illness. Animals, including pets, should not come into contact with the water in affected locations.

Information about blue green algae is available on the DELWP website <http://www.water.vic.gov.au/.../rivers.../blue-green-algae> and from the DELWP Customer Service Centre on 136 186.

Health information on toxic algae can be found at <http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/.../Harmful-algal-blooms>

## Media contacts

**Media enquiries relating to blue green algae, monitoring, sampling and incident management:** Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP)  
Ebony Battersby [ebony.battersby@delwp.vic.gov.au](mailto:ebony.battersby@delwp.vic.gov.au)

**Media enquiries relating to health advice and health impacts:** Department of Health  
1300 758 551 or [press@health.vic.gov.au](mailto:press@health.vic.gov.au)

**Media enquiries relating to food regulations, advice and product recalls:** PrimeSafe  
Susan McNair ph 0439 389 202