

Broome boom 1 Feb 2007 is choking bay

By DALE MILLER

A NEW outbreak of toxic blue-green algae in Roebuck Bay has heightened fears the world-renowned feature could be under threat from urban development.

Blooms of the algae, *Lyngbya majuscula* – otherwise known as mermaid hair or stinging limu – have been noticed in recent weeks in waters surrounding Town Beach.

Lyngbya grows attached to seagrass, seaweed and rocks in clumps of fine, dark cotton wool-like strands up to 30cm long.

Growth of the algae has been linked to nutrient and dissolved organics from land clearing and alterations in groundwater along with high rainfall and suitable light and temperature.



A CLOSE-UP of the algae.

Department of Environment and Conservation district nature conservation co-ordinator Troy Sinclair said the *lyngbya* seemed to respond to nutrients in the water and townsite development could have contributed to the level of nutrients in Roebuck Bay.

"As the town gets bigger, there are certainly more nutrients coming off the landscape, which is happening in other areas of Australia," he said.

The reports come after a severe *lyngbya* outbreak at the same time last year prompted a call for public help from the Roebuck Bay Working Group, which wanted to determine whether the blooms were part of a natural phenomenon.

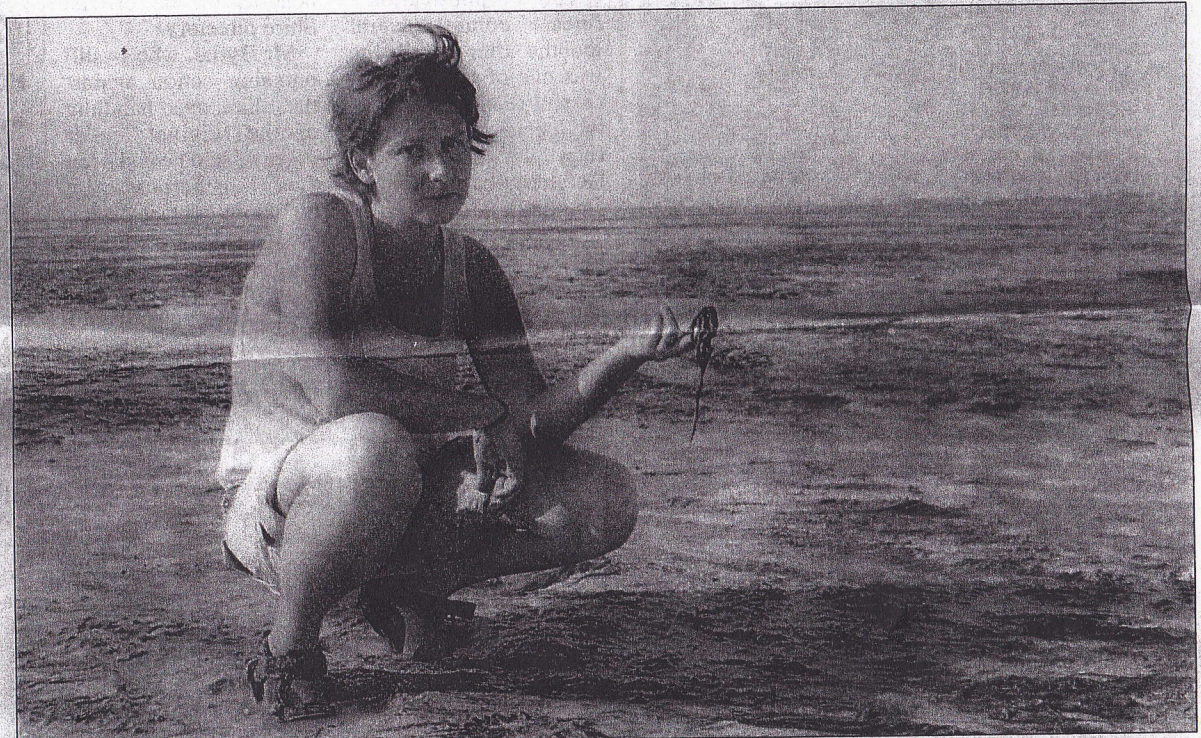
Mr Sinclair said the algae seemed to reappear on the seagrass beds once the water warmed up and would eventually detach and form clumps that drifted in the water.

"Whether last year was the first or the worst case, we don't really know," he said. "It's certainly the worst I've seen in the past 10 years I've lived here."

Mr Sinclair said dugongs, turtles and other marine creatures that either fed or lived on the seagrass could be affected.

Blooms of the algae have been a major problem in Moreton Bay, Queensland, since 1997 where it has caused a noted decline in fisheries.

The local outbreak follows the



THREAT: Danielle Bain examines some of the toxic algae, *Lyngbya majuscula*, in Roebuck Bay.

announcement of an \$18,000 grant under the State Government's Coastwest program to help run a seagrass monitoring project in the bay.

Project co-ordinator Danielle Bain said the *lyngbya* had become far more prevalent in the past two

weeks and had smothered all the seagrass.

Broome Shire president Graeme Campbell said he would request the State Government provide scientific data on the algae. "If it is the naturally occurring algae known as mermaid hair found in Roebuck Bay last

year, then we will be cautioning people to avoid swimming in the affected area," he said.

Volunteers are needed for the seagrass monitoring program, which is expected to start in March. Interested people are asked to contact Mrs Bain on 9192 7741.