



8 January 2010

Media Statement

Algae returns to Roebuck Bay

Outbreaks of the blue-green algae *lyngbya*, sometimes referred to as Maidens Hair, have once again been detected in Roebuck Bay.

Local residents informed local management bodies after they sighted the algae forming large mats that covered sections of water, mangroves, mud and rocks near Dampier Creek. Sizeable blooms have also been found on seagrass meadows off Town Beach and Demco in Roebuck Bay.

The Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC), in collaboration with the Roebuck Bay Working Group, has begun an investigation into the presence of the algae.

DEC Nature Conservation Coordinator Sharon Ferguson said *lyngbya* can occur naturally at low levels in tropical areas but can also bloom, forming thick algal mats, which may be caused by temperature changes associated with the wet season, as well as increased nutrients or runoff.

"As well as potentially impacting on the environment it can also be a smelly and unsightly addition to the Bay," she said.

"*Lyngbya majuscula* may be toxic at certain stages of its growth and can impact negatively on essential marine ecosystems such as seagrass meadows and mangroves, as well as associated fauna.

"In its toxic state it can cause a range of symptoms to people who come in contact with it which may include a burning sensation on the skin and eye irritation."

The Broome Community Seagrass Monitoring Project, co-managed by Environs Kimberley and DEC, monitors the presence of the algae within three set monitoring sites in Roebuck Bay.

Coordinator Fiona Bishop said that *lyngbya* can impact on the health of seagrass beds.

"*Lyngbya* can lead to a reduction in the density of seagrass meadows and it can adversely impact on animal species ranging from fish to dugong and turtles," she said.

"Continued research into the presence and cause of this algae is important to keep the public safe and to protect the health of Roebuck Bay, which is of global environmental significance."

Members of the public are advised to keep away from suspected algal blooms and report them to the DEC Broome office on 9195 5500.