

Molonglo Waterwatch Monthly Report December 2008 and January 2009 in our Catchment

Thanks to all of you who have sent in your reports for December 2008 and January 2009. It was wonderful to hear about the water dragons that come to watch, and all the other wildlife notes. The frogs are especially important to hear about, as are long necked turtles. And the native and exotic fish, even the *Gambusia*, help us to add weight to your physical and chemical data.

Captains Flat Landcare (the Hodgman family) sent in the photo below of algae forming rafts on the surface of the pools of standing water in the Molonglo at their site. All of you may have seen versions of this phenomenon. As the summer progresses many of the filamentous algae that live on weed and snags in the deeper water or cling to the stones and reeds in the riffles reach maturity, fragment, float to the surface, get sunburnt and form clumps. These rafts of rotting algae frequently also contain the spores, the tiny packets of living material with a weatherproof skin, that allow the various different organisms to survive the coming dry period. Yes, the rafts look hideous, and can feel worse, and even smell rich, but they are just part of the way things work. They do not generally include poisonous cyanobacteria, although other cyanobacteria can be important components. For a botanist of freshwater algae, like me, they are fascinating...and I can assure you that they do look fascinating under the microscope. Please keep reporting them.



Algal rafts forming in the drying pools of the upper Molonglo River, January 2009.

Now for some comments on the report findings:

December

Flow has slowed markedly at most sights, and some are already just pools; the pH at Sullivans Ck in Mitchell is very strongly alkaline, while at most other sites it is very close to neutral (7.0); the Electrical Conductivity readings are elevated, especially in the rural limestone areas, as would be expected as flow drops and evaporation far outstrips rainfall; and the pool that was once, and will be again, Urila Ck is very muddy, while most other sites are clear.

January

Flow was negligible at best at all sights; pH was in the satisfactory range everywhere that has been reported, and Electrical Conductivity continued to be elevated in the same places as last month, for the same reasons; there were no incidents of elevated turbidity reported.

Stephen Skinner

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