



Media Release

Thursday, August 24th, 2017

Whose poo is this? TEER Releases Faecal Source Tracking Results

Early results of a new water monitoring project show that livestock and humans contributed similar levels of faecal bacteria into the upper Tamar estuary between January and June this year.

The Faecal Source Tracking Pilot Project aimed to detect whether the Enterococci bacteria found in water samples taken monthly from key sites in the estuary, had come from humans or livestock.

This project only focused on faecal bacteria from humans and livestock. On average, these two sources accounted for between 30% and 50% of the faecal bacteria, which indicated there were other sources which this first stage of the study did not identify.

The study was funded through NRM North's Tamar Estuary and Esk Rivers (TEER) Program, with additional funding from the City of Launceston and the West Tamar Council.

It is an initiative of the TEER Program and is supported by a working group which includes representatives from TasWater, Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment, City of Launceston, Meander Valley Council and the West Tamar Council.

TEER Program Scientific and Technical Coordinator, Dr Toni Furlonge, said the results between January and June showed similar faecal bacteria contributions from humans and livestock.

"There were slightly more bacteria from livestock (horses, sheep and cattle) than from humans (sewerage treatment plants and septic systems) collected from water samples near Kings Bridge and the shiplift, and more similar contributions from livestock and humans (sewerage treatment plants) from Tamar Island to Blackwall," Dr Furlonge said.

"Regular water sampling has also shown that bacteria levels increased during rain and the days following rain, which could be attributed to surface runoff. Sampling during the months with low rainfall recorded bacteria levels below regulatory standards for recreational water use.

"The results indicate there may be other sources of bacteria that this project did not identify as we only focussed on bacteria from livestock and humans.

"We are pleased to announce that the working group has decided to extend the study so we can investigate possible other sources and gather 12 months of data across all seasons," Dr Furlonge said.

NRM North engaged consultant John Adulcikas to analyse water samples from eight sites in the upper Tamar from Launceston to Hillwood.

Mr Adulcikas said extending the project would provide valuable information about bacteria in the upper Tamar.

"This will enable us to better define the sources of bacteria as we are also attempting to identify bacteria from combined system overflows and stormwater," Mr Adulcikas said.

This information will enable the TEER Program to target on-ground activities and investment in infrastructure improvements throughout the larger catchments and around Launceston, to further decrease the amount of bacteria moving into the Tamar estuary.

This project will complement the TEER Program's Water Quality Improvement Plan (WQIP) released in 2015, which has targets for lowering the levels of bacteria in the Tamar estuary over the next few years.

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