



Media Release

Wednesday, 16th December, 2009

NEW PROGRAM TO ASSESS THE HEALTH OF THE TAMAR ESTUARY

A new collaborative program is underway to assess the health of the Tamar Estuary and Esk Rivers in northern Tasmania.

The Ecosystem Health Monitoring Program (EHMP) is a joint initiative between NRM North's Tamar Estuary and Esk Rivers (TEER) Program, local, state and federal governments, industry groups and the community.

Under the program, 20 sites in five zones ranging from Kings Bridge in Launceston to five kilometres off shore near Hebe Reef along the Tamar estuary, will be monitored monthly for a number of health indicators.

These include dissolved oxygen, pH, turbidity, salinity, temperature, nutrients, total suspended solids, bacteria and heavy metals.

All the data will be collated in a central database and the TEER will release an annual report card in the monitoring years which will give a grade ranging from A to F for each zone.

The monitoring program will run on a four year cycle; two years on and two years off.

In the two years off monitoring cycle, the TEER will aim to do discrete research projects. One priority project will include sampling different fish species in the estuary for seafood safety to ensure they are safe for human consumption.

TEER Program Manager, Amanda Locatelli, said coordinated data collection would generate information that enables better understanding of the environmental issues in the Tamar estuary.

"This will lead to the development and evaluation of appropriate TEER environmental management strategies.

"The program will provide accurate and timely information to decision makers, natural resource managers, land users and the public through these technical reports and report cards." Ms Locatelli said.

The TEER monitoring agreement has been signed by:

- NRM North
- Environment Protection Authority
- Department of Health and Human Services
- Launceston City Council
- West Tamar Council
- George Town Council
- Meander Valley Council
- Ben Lomond Water
- Hydro Tasmania
- Australian Maritime College/University of Tasmania

- Rio Tinto Alcan
- BHP Billiton TEMCO
- Beaconsfield Gold
- Van Dieman Aquaculture

TEER Scientific and Technical Officer, Michael Attard, said it had been very inspiring working with the TEER partners who all give freely of their time and expertise.

“It is exciting to be involved in a team that shows so much passion and commitment to better understanding the Tamar estuary.” Mr Attard said.

The General Manager of Van Diemen Aquaculture, Mick Hortle, said they were happy to be involved in the program.

“We all have a shared interest in the health of the Tamar estuary and ongoing monitoring to ensure it remains in a healthy state.

“We are keen to know more about what is going on in the estuary, particularly in our area at Longreach.

“Van Diemen Aquaculture has a vested interest as we are looking to run an experimental salmon farm in the next few years and we need background data before we can start that process.” Mr Hortle said.

The Chief Executive Officer of NRM North, James McKee, expects the program would be welcomed by the community.

“Water quality issues such as sedimentation, high nutrient levels and e-coli have dominated community debate within northern Tasmania for many years.” Mr McKee said.

“The community is becoming increasingly aware of these issues and seeking answers regarding the health of the estuary.

“Managers of natural resources are under increasing pressure to demonstrate they are basing management decisions on robust science.

“To have so many industry groups sign up to the program shows a strong commitment to work together to develop sustainable environmental management strategies for the estuary.” Mr McKee said.

The first report card is expected to be released in April and the information can be obtained by contacting the TEER Program through NRM North on 6333 7777 or admin@nrmnorth.org.au

**** FILM/PHOTO OPPORTUNITY:** NRM North staff will be carrying out water testing at Van Diemen Aquaculture, 627 Rowella Road, Rowella, between 11am and 12pm today.

Ends

For more information contact:
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