



Joint Media Release

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THE SECOND TEER REPORT CARD SHOWS NO DECLINE IN TAMAR ESTUARY HEALTH

The results of the second health snapshot for the Tamar estuary mark an important stage in the continued understanding into the health and function of the Tamar estuary.

The ecosystem health report card undertaken by NRM North's Tamar Estuary and Esk Rivers (TEER) Program, shows the health of the estuary appears to be stable.

The 2011 Tamar estuary report card was launched today by the Environment, Parks and Heritage Minister, Brian Wightman, at the Tamar Island Wetlands Centre.

NRM North's Chief Executive Officer, James McKee, said it was encouraging to observe that this year's report card grades are comparable to the 10 year base line grades, which suggest that there has been no apparent decline in ecosystem health ratings.

"The fact that the studies show we are not going backwards with the health of the Tamar is an important achievement in the quest to improve the health and amenity of the estuary. It allows us to focus on improvement rather than just slowing decline." Mr McKee said.

"The report shows some pleasing results with the mouth of the Tamar estuary described as being in excellent condition. This zone was given an A- indicating excellent recreational water quality with guidelines met all of the time.

"However, there are a range of environmental impacts on the Tamar estuary, partly as a result of urbanisation and development. This is reflected in the different ratings scored by the various zones identified in the report card."

The 2011 report card incorporates current data collected from monitoring sites along the Tamar while the 2010 report card incorporated historically gathered data.

The report card uses a grading system of A through to F for five zones within the estuary, with A being 'Excellent' and F 'Fail'.

The grades represent the overall health of the Tamar estuary from 20 monitoring sites ranging from Kings Bridge around Launceston to near Hebe Reef in Bass Strait for the monitoring period of October 2009 to September 2010.

The indicators monitored during this time include; dissolved oxygen, pH, turbidity, salinity, temperature, nutrients, total suspended solids, bacteria and metals.

TEER Scientific and Technical Officer, Michael Attard, said unlike the mouth of the Tamar estuary, the upper Tamar estuary near Launceston received a D+ (Poor) with higher levels of turbidity, nutrients and metals.

"The D+ rating didn't come as a surprise as the upper Tamar estuary is the point at which pollutant inputs are concentrated as they are delivered from the upper catchment river systems and surrounding urbanised areas."

The mid-lower estuary (George Town/Bell Bay) received a B+, the mid estuary (Hillwood, Deviot, Beaconsfield) received a B+ and the mid upper estuary (Dilston, Legana, Exeter) received a B-.

"The report card also shows all zones have periods where water quality guidelines are not met and rainfall (wet and dry years) can significantly affect water quality." Mr Attard said.

Mr Wightman said the TEER Program had been established as a vehicle to work co-operatively towards managing Tamar estuary issues.

"The State Government is committed to managing the health of the Tamar estuary and has allocated significant resources to NRM North for the Tamar Estuary and Esk Rivers (TEER) Program to continue to coordinate and implement priority activities aimed at improving waterway health.

"The State Government also commends the TEER Program for fostering important partnerships such as the Ecosystem Health Assessment Program to monitor and report on the health of the TEER waterways."

Mr Wightman said the report card and associated monitoring report provides the community and natural resources managers with the information required to ensure the Tamar estuary can be effectively managed into the future to support a healthy and diverse ecosystem.

Fifteen monitoring partners have contributed to the development of the report card under the TEER Program's Ecosystem Health Assessment Program (EHAP) including; NRM North, the EPA Division of the State Government, Launceston City Council, West Tamar Council, George Town Council, Meander Valley Council, Northern Midlands Council, the Australian Maritime College, the University of Tasmania, Hydro Tasmania, BHP Billiton TEMCO, Rio Tinto, BCD Resources, Van Diemen Aquaculture and Ben Lomond Water.

The monitoring program will run on a four year cycle consisting of two years of continuous monthly monitoring followed by two years off.

During the off period, the TEER will focus on discrete research projects and working with partners to develop management strategies and implement actions to address the problem areas identified by the monitoring program.

The Tamar Estuary Report Card 2011 and associated publications can be downloaded from the NRM North website: www.nrmnorth.org.au.

In an exciting new development, the report card will now also be available as a smart phone application available for free download from the iTunes store by searching for "TEER".

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