



Joint Media Release

Wednesday, 28th November, 2012

TEER REPORT CARD SHOWS IMPROVEMENT IN UPPER TAMAR ESTUARY HEALTH

The Tamar Estuary and Esk Rivers (TEER) Program has released its third report card into the health of the Tamar River estuary.

The ecosystem health report card was launched today by the Environment, Parks and Heritage Minister, Brian Wightman, at the Boathouse in Launceston.

TEER Program Manager, Amanda Locatelli, said this year had seen an improvement in the health of the upper Tamar estuary compared to last year.

"This section of the estuary from Launceston city to Legana has gone from a D+ which is 'poor' to a C- which is 'fair'," Ms Locatelli said.

"The higher rainfall during the monitoring period has led to greater flushing of bacteria from the upper estuary resulting in a better health grade, however water quality is still poor and hasn't improved from the previous year."

The higher rainfall has also resulted in the slight decline in health of the lower estuary (Tamar River mouth) from an A- (excellent) to a B+ (good) as pollutants are flushed into the lower estuary.

"This is typical of how estuaries function as wetter periods generally correspond to poorer water quality in estuaries as pollutant loads increase during these high flow periods," Ms Locatelli said.

NRM North Chief Executive Officer, James McKee, said the results indicated the Tamar estuary was in relatively good condition compared to similar estuaries around Australia.

"Overall, the changes in the grades for 2012 compared to 2011 are due to natural variation and climate influence as they are also similar to the longer term 10 year average shown in the first report card produced in 2010.

"There are still a range of environmental issues affecting the Tamar estuary as a result of urbanisation and development and it is important we continue to work together to manage these."

In other results, the mid-upper estuary (Dilston, Legana, Exeter) received a B- which is the same as last year, the mid estuary (Hillwood, Deviot, Beaconsfield) received a B compared to a B+ last year and the mid-lower estuary (George Town/Bell Bay) received a B compared to a B+ last year.

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 2010 to September 2011.

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

The Minister for Environment, Parks and Heritage, Brian Wightman, commended the TEER Program for fostering important partnerships across governments, industry and the wider community.

"As Tasmanians, we all have a stake in keeping our local environment clean and healthy – including our rivers," Mr Wightman said.

"The Tamar in particular has captured a lot of attention. Many Launceston residents feel strongly about its health and appearance, and rightly so.

"It's pleasing to see the upper Tamar estuary improving slightly, but it's a very complex and vulnerable waterway, and there's still a lot of work to do.

"The Ecosystem Health Assessment Program is an example of all working together to keep an eye on the health of our waterways," he said.

Sixteen 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 State Government, Environment Protection Authority, 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, Bell Bay Aluminium, BCD Resources, Van Diemen Aquaculture and Ben Lomond Water.

The Tamar Estuary Report Card 2012 and associated publications can be downloaded from the TEER website: www.nrmnorth.org.au/teer

In an exciting new development, the report card will also be available in 3D. A companion app for Apple devices has been developed. People can tour the Tamar estuary in 3D by using augmented and virtual reality to explore the habitats, flora and fauna, and issues affecting the estuary health.

Ends

For more information contact:

Melissa Lewarn, Community Engagement & Communications Manager, NRM North, 6333 7776 or 0427 354 058.