



Joint Media Release

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TEER RELEASES FIRST REPORT CARD INTO HEALTH OF TAMAR ESTUARY

A new report card released today is the first health snapshot for the Tamar estuary produced under NRM North's Tamar Estuary and Esk Rivers (TEER) Program.

The Tamar Estuary Report Card 2010 was launched by the Member for Bass, Michelle O'Byrne, at the Tamar Island Wetlands Centre today.

Fourteen 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, the Australian Maritime College, the University of Tasmania, Hydro Tasmania, BHP Billiton TEMCO, Rio Tinto Alcan, BCD Resources, Van Diemen Aquaculture and Ben Lomond Water.

Ms O'Byrne said the first results of the Tamar Estuary Ecosystem Health Assessment Program had been made available in an easy to understand format that provides the community with a 'snapshot' of the health of the river.

"The report card shows the overall ecosystem health of the Tamar is good when compared to other estuaries around Australia that are surrounded by a similar level of urban development." Ms O'Byrne said.

"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 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 35 monitoring sites using historical data from 1999 to 2009. The indicators monitored during this time include; dissolved oxygen, pH, turbidity, salinity, temperature, nutrients, total suspended solids, bacteria and metals.

TEER Program Manager, Amanda Locatelli, said the report card was an historic snapshot of ecosystem health for the Tamar estuary and a reference point for future report cards.

"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 minus indicating excellent recreational water quality with guidelines met all of the time.

"The report found the water quality can be impacted during storm events but overall the zone is in excellent health." Ms Locatelli said.

The upper Tamar estuary near Launceston did not receive the same good rating. This zone received a D (Poor) indicating poor water quality with high levels of turbidity, total nitrogen and elevated metals probably due to historic mining activities.

"This 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." Ms Locatelli said.

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

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.

NRM North Chief Executive Officer, James McKee, said this information was crucial to ensure effective management of the estuary.

"This program will provide natural resource managers with the information required to identify and target problem areas for management.

"This key information will also enable us to assess the effectiveness of current and future management strategies and actions." Mr McKee said.

Ms O'Byrne commended the TEER Program for fostering important partnerships, such as the Ecosystem Health Assessment Program, to monitor and report on the health of the Tamar estuary.

She said robust science and good planning were crucial to managing the environment effectively for the long term.

"The TEER Ecosystem Health Assessment Program and the release of the report cards are an important step to ensuring we have access to the best science and information to address these issues.

"Over the past decade or so important steps have been taken by government, industries, councils and the community to improve the health of the Tamar. This includes upgrades to wastewater treatment plants, reuse of effluent and wastewater, and environmental improvements to a number of large industries along the estuary.

"However, there is much more that we can do and the Tasmanian Government is committed to managing the health of the Tamar estuary. We will continue to work closely with NRM North and other partners of the TEER Program." Ms O'Byrne said.

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 2010 can be downloaded from the NRM North website:
www.nrmnorth.org.au.

Ends

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