

Media Release

15 December 2010

Barramundi deaths

Hundreds of barramundi and other native fish are expected to die as a result of recent rain.

A local landholder contacted natural resource management body NQ Dry Tropics after noticing schools of barramundi lying on the side of a lagoon.

Diana O'Donnell from NQ Dry Tropics said fish kills following heavy downpours are natural but they are increased by human activity.

"Fish kills associated with rain events occur every few years. The fish are dying from lack of oxygen resulting from hot weather after flooding.

"The water in wetlands and lagoons is warm now and warm water can't hold as much dissolved oxygen as cold water.

"Fish in shallow lagoons are most affected because the water is warmer."

Larger fish, like female barramundi, are also most affected because they can't gulp enough air at the water's surface.

Exacerbating the problem are crops and introduced weed grasses like hymenachne and para grass.

They affect oxygen levels because rotting matter in the water uses up oxygen.

Road culverts and weeds can also exacerbate fish kills because they stop fish moving to better locations. NQ Dry Tropics is reducing water weeds and removing barriers to fish movement.

Diana said there are other things we may be able to do to reduce fish kills.

Temporary fountains can also boost oxygen in badly affected lagoons. Paddle wheels beating the water surface do the same thing.

"We would like to hear from landholders who would be interested in using their pumps in a trial to see if we can boost oxygen levels.

"In the longer term it has been discussed whether we can flush water through the system after the flood has receded to remove the low dissolved oxygen water.

"We would have to be careful not to cause flooding if local rain is occurring at the same time." Diana said.

People who see fish kills can call the Department of Environment and Resource Management Fish Kill Hotline on 1300 130 372 or call NQ Dry Tropics for more information.

