

Statewide

WATERWAYS | Tests on new system

Early warning on algal bloom risk

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SCIENCE REPORTER

AN early warning system designed to catch algal blooms before they contaminate waterways is being developed by an Adelaide consulting firm.

Water Data Services co-director Bruce Nicholson says the technology will predict when an outbreak is likely, so authorities have time to act.

"What the new system will do is provide enough warning for them to be able to take some sort of action, to prevent the bloom occurring," he said.

The prototype will be up and running by next June and ready.

The scheme should be ready to market by end of 2008.

SA Water, meanwhile, is working with Water Data Services to collect Murray River water samples on a weekly basis at 27 sites from Renmark down to Wellington.

"With water levels falling, they've got to be very careful their pump intakes are still accessing good quality water," Mr Nicholson said.

Senior hydrographer Russell Jones measures river flow and water quality on the Murray and Torrens rivers. "One of the ways to get rid of the algae is to increase the flow in the Torrens, so we need to know how much flow is there," he said.

It is harder to flush rivers with fresh water in drought. SA Water outlined its approach to outbreaks.

AERIAL photography helps identify problems in the river, wetlands and lagoons.

PUMPING stations have "algal scum booms" to stop most of the algae from entering the pipes.

WATER treatment plants also have been modified to treat contaminated water. Extra doses of carbon can help remove toxins.



MONITOR: Russell Jones at Second Creek.

PICTURE: SARAH REED

Both SA Water and the Environment Protection Authority have expressed an interest in technology to predict algal blooms.

Environment Protection Authority scientific officer Dr Shaun Thomas said that the low water flows combined with warm, calm

weather and high levels of nutrients in the water was a recipe for algal blooms.

"With less flows in the Murray, if you get the right conditions for an algal bloom to grow, that can add lots of operational issues for SA Water," he said.