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MEDIA RELEASE

Update on fish health at Lake Awoonga

Gladstone Area Water Board (GAWB) continues to monitor the health and behaviour of the fish in Lake Awoonga, following reports of deceased fish at the lake and other Queensland impoundments over the last month.

GAWB Chief Executive Officer, Darren Barlow, said the number of deceased fish observed around the lake has increased since the first isolated cases were reported in July.

“The deceased fish are mostly barramundi and catfish,” Barlow said.

“Prolonged environmental conditions such as unseasonal rain, cold weather and high winds are believed to have contributed to this naturally occurring event.

“This event is not linked to water quality, nor is there any risk to drinking water quality for our community. We continue to test on a regular basis as per our normal processes.

“We have a very experienced team monitoring this situation, with investigations underway to help us determine other potential causes for this event. We are also working with the Department of Environment and Science and Department of Regional Development, Manufacturing & Water to report our findings and respond accordingly.

“Please be careful and do not handle dead or sick fish as they can pose a health risk if you are spiked or cut.”

Members of the public can report fish death sightings to the Queensland Department of Environment and Science pollution hotline on 1300 130 372 or contact GAWB on 4976 3000.

ENDS.

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. *Why are fish dying at Lake Awoonga?*

Prolonged environmental conditions such as unseasonal rain, low water temperatures and high winds are believed to be impacting the health and behaviour of fish living in Lake Awoonga. This occurrence is consistent with fish kill events being encountered at other impoundments throughout Queensland.

2. *What is GAWB doing about it?*

GAWB has a very experienced team monitoring this situation, with investigations continuing to help determine other potential causes for this event. This includes working with the Department of Environment and Science and Department of Regional Development, Manufacturing & Water to report and share our findings and respond accordingly.

3. *Is the fish kill caused by eutrophication or other pollutants entering the water?*

No, there is nothing to indicate the presence of unusual minerals, nutrients or pollutants in the water.

4. *Is fish health impacted by the 'heavy weed' coverage currently on the surface of the lake?*

No, fish health is not affected by aquatic plants present in Lake Awoonga. Most of the aquatic plant life you see on the surface of Lake Awoonga are not weeds. They are natural freshwater aquatic plants. Cover has decreased over the past few months due to seasonal change and increased water levels.

5. *Is the fish kill impacting water quality?*

There is no risk to water quality, and there is nothing to indicate the presence of unusual minerals and nutrients or pollutants in the water.

6. *Is fish health impacted by lower than normal water levels?*

Shallow, warm water bays near the shoreline are the preferred fish habitat during cooler months. Current water levels are impacting the size and availability of these bays.

7. *When will GAWB start restocking the lake again?*

GAWB is currently commissioning its new hatchery facility at Awoonga Dam. As part of those commissioning activities, approximately 80,000 fingerlings were released in May this year. GAWB is currently in preproduction for restocking activities for the 2022/2023 restocking period.