

Fish Death Events

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Incident Coordination Unit, Regulatory Services Branch, Operations Division

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| Response Guide |



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Environment Protection Authority Victoria

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1300 372 84

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# Purpose of this guideline

## Introduction

The purpose of this document is to provide agencies with guidance and clarification on the arrangements and responsibilities for the response and management of fish death events.

## Fish death events

A fish death event is a sudden and unexpected mass mortality of fish. Fish deaths can occur in inland or marine waters. They can be caused by a range of factors including:

* low levels, or flow, of water in waterways
* poor-quality water
* low oxygen
* high and/or low and rapid change in temperatures, or
* high nutrients.

Fish deaths may also occur with the first rains after bushfires, algal blooms, or as a result of pollution incidents, disease, or fishing bycatch. For the purposes of this document a fish death event includes the deaths of:

* fin fish
* eels
* molluscs (such as mussels)
* and crustaceans (e.g. yabbies and crayfish).

A fish death event may involve the deaths of multiple fish species.

# Notification of fish death event

## Incident notification

It is most likely that agencies or the public will be the first to notice or receive information in relation to a fish death event. The public and agencies should report all fish death events to EPA by calling 1300 EPA VIC (1300 372 842), 24 hours a day. Please note do not call the EPA regional offices directly.

## Information to be provided to EPA

Provide the EPA call-taker with as much of the following initial information as possible and specify that this is a ‘fish death event’:

* name of person and return phone number
* location and extent of incident
* time the incident occurred/was noticed
* approximate number, size, species, and condition of dead fish
* whether fish are dead or merely affected
* extent of event (single or multiple locations)
* whether other fauna are affected or appear to be healthy
* flow conditions of the waterway, or any unusual conditions
* any probable cause such as an algal bloom, disease, low dissolved oxygen, or water levels
* what action, if any, is currently being undertaken.

# Initial assessment and triage

## Assessment

EPA operates a central triage and dispatch function between 08:30 and 22:00 seven days a week. A report of a fish death event will prompt the Rostered Dispatch Officer to contact the reporter to seek further information to enable a triage priority and determine appropriate response actions. The information that has been provided in the [Fish Death Notification Report [Part A]](#_Appendix_A_–) will support the triage decision.

The assessment will consider factors such as the:

* size of event
* sensitivity of waterway
* potential cause (e.g. environmental, pollution, disease agent)
* species affected
* potential public interest, and
* environmental or public health consequences.

## Triage

EPA monitors, assesses, and triages community and business pollution reports to ensure that a timely and appropriate response is provided. This includes direct feedback to reporters and notification of other agencies.

EPA response times based on triage decision are:

* Immediate Response – Emergency response
* Priority Response – Field response within 24 hours
* Planned response - Field response/inspection within 28 days
* Desktop response - within 28 days.

Fish death events not related to an emergency incident would generally result in a Priority response. Where the cause of the incident is indicated in the notification, EPA will notify agencies with management, investigation, or enforcement responsibilities, such as biosecurity or fisheries.

# Response and field investigation

If a field investigation is warranted based on the triage decision, EPA will direct staff to attend. At this point, a regional point of contact will be assigned by dispatch to lead the EPA investigation. In some circumstances, EPA may request assistance from an appropriate agency with the capability and capacity to respond and assist with the investigation. This may be the case where EPA does not have an office in the area, in which case agencies with local capacity will assist.

Investigating officers will inspect the site and complete a [Fish Death Investigation Report [Part B]](#_Appendix_B_–). The completed report and other information such as photos or information should be emailed to EPADispatch@epa.vic.gov.au.

Details of the field investigation will be shared with agencies with management, investigation or enforcement responsibilities relating to the incident or its cause, such as Victorian Fisheries Authority (VFA), Agriculture Victoria, catchment management authority, water corporation, local government, or another asset manager. Investigating officers will liaise with EPA to determine whether sampling and or clean-up is required.

## Inter-agency notifications

In the event of a fish death notification, EPA will notify the VFA Operations Duty Officer and asset manager to support the timely management of agency responsibilities and a coordinated response ([Appendix C Key contacts](#_Appendix_C_–)). EPA will also notify the regional catchment management authority.

If disease is suspected based on observed fish condition (i.e. parasites, discolouration, or lesions), EPA will also notify the Agriculture Victoria Emergency Animal Disease Hotline.

New South Wales (NSW) has jurisdiction over the Murray River and reports of fish deaths will be referred to the NSW Department of Primary Industries by EPA.

# Collection and analysis of samples

Water and fish samples should be taken if a pollutant, algae, or disease is suspected. Fish death sampling guidance provides detailed information on the process for collecting, storing, and analysing samples for pathology and toxicology. Generally, water samples should be taken from the affected area, and if possible, from a nearby unaffected area for comparison. Water samples should be kept cold, but not frozen.

EPA has analysis contracts with laboratories in metropolitan and regional Victoria. Sampling guidance is available from the EPA Science Services Team. All samples must be logged via the Science Services Team and accompanied by a chain of custody form before submission to an appropriate NATA laboratory for testing as soon as possible.

Where sampling and analysis has been undertaken on behalf of EPA, results should be provided to EPA as soon as possible.

Prompt analysis and reporting will assist EPA to advise on the cause of the event and clean up management actions (if not already advised). Investigating officers will liaise with EPA to determine whether clean-up is required.

# Ongoing management

EPA will determine the required management actions following assessment of the fish death event based on the information available, which may include notifications, field investigation and analysis of samples – as required.

Management action will include:

* Identification and transfer to the relevant agency for ongoing management (e.g. asset manager or control agency for an emergency).
* Stakeholder communications – EPA will liaise with the VFA and other agencies to facilitate effective communication with key stakeholder groups (e.g. fishers).
* Clean-up and waste management advice to the asset manager.
* Referral to another agency for follow up investigation under other legislation.

# Public information/media

Fish death events often generate significant community concern. Informing the public with timely information is important from both a public safety and community confidence perspective. EPA will initially post social media content through Twitter. Where appropriate, pollution alert, website updates and media releases will be issued depending on the severity of the event. Supporting agencies are encouraged to repost and/or post their own notices.

Suggested formats for initial media and social media platform holding lines are below.

## EPA holding line/social media pre-prepared content

“EPA is investigating a report of dead fish at XXX. EPA advises avoiding the area and not to handle dead or dying fish.”

## Support agency holding lines/social media pre-prepared content

“XXX agency is aware of dead fish at XXX. We are supporting EPA, who advise avoiding the area and not to handle dead or dying fish.”

“EPA is investigating a report of dead fish at XXX. EPA advises avoiding the area and not to handle dead or dying fish.”

# Emergency response

There is no Victorian control agency for response to a fish death event under the State Emergency Management Plan (SEMP). For a fish death event of high public concern, significant environmental or public consequence or such scale that it requires an ongoing management structure, consideration will be given to escalating the event into Victoria’s emergency management arrangements.

EPA will seek to transfer management to the most appropriate control agency, depending on the cause of the event. EPA will support the control agency as a technical advisor in emergency management.

Key considerations in determining an appropriate control Agency would be:

* Fish deaths caused as a direct result of a Class 1 emergency should initially be managed as a consequence of that emergency. Control may transfer at a point in time to manage any ongoing fish death impacts or as part of recovery activities.
* Fish death events caused by natural occurrence, non-hazardous pollution or disease should be managed as a Class 2 emergency. The appropriate Control Agency will depend on who is best placed to manage the response and impacts (e.g. Agriculture Victoria where disease is the cause, or catchment management authority where water quality is the suspected cause).

NSW has jurisdiction over the Murray River. A range of Victorian agencies may be required to support management of Victorian consequences including EPA, DEECA, Parks Victoria, VFA, Agriculture Victoria, catchment management authority, water corporation and local government.

# Appendix A – Fish Death Notification Report [Part A]

NAME OF WATERBODY: ...............................................................................................................................................................................................

CATCHMENT: ......................................................................................................................................................................................................................

PRECISE LOCATION WITHIN WATERBODY: ...................................................................................................................................................

(Place a pin on a Google Earth map and email with the KMZ or KML file attached)

HABITAT DESCRIPTION: (tick/circle as appropriate)

1. Freshwater [ ]  Estuarine [ ]  Marine [ ]
2. Stream[ ]  River[ ]  Anabranch[ ]  Lake[ ]  Billabong[ ]  Swamp[ ]  Drain[ ]  Channel[ ]  Impoundment[ ]  Bay[ ]  Lagoon[ ]  Farm Dam [ ]  Beach[ ]  Open Ocean[ ]  Other:...............................................................................................

REPORTED BY: Name:................................................................................................................. Phone:...................................................................

Address: ...................................................................................................................................................................................................................................

TIME / DATE REPORTED: ............................................... TIME / DATE FISH DEATH FIRST OBSERVED:........................................

WEATHER CONDITIONS PRIOR TO OBSERVATION OF FISH DEATH: ….........................................................................................

….........................................................................................….........................................................................................…..............................................................

TIDAL STATE/WATER LEVEL AT TIME OF FISH DEATH (if applicable): ........................................................................................

NUMBERS OF FISH AFFECTED (tick): less than 10 [ ]  10 to 100 [ ]  100s [ ]  1000s [ ]  10,000s [ ]  100,000s [ ]  millions [ ]

CONDITION OF FISH (tick): dying[ ]  freshly dead[ ]  few hours old[ ]  few days old[ ]  decomposed[ ]

SIZE OF FISH (circle): all similar size ( .................. cm) / range of size classes ( ................... to cm)

SPECIES OF FISH AFFECTED (tick): one species only[ ]  few species[ ]  many different species[ ]

Please list if known: ..........................................................................................................................................................................................................

LOCATION OF FISH (tick): floating in water[ ]  on bottom[ ]  along water’s edge[ ]  onshore[ ]

EXTENT OF FISH DEATH (area (ha) or length (m) of area affected):.............................................................................................

(Create a polygon or line on a Google Earth map and email through the KMZ or KML file)

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS OF REPORTING PERSON: .............................................................................................................................

OTHER FORMS OF WILDLIFE AFFECTED? (specify): .................................................................................................................................

WHAT IS THE SUSPECTED CAUSE? .....................................................................................................................................................................

OTHER INDIVIDUALS & AUTHORITIES NOTIFIED

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| INDIVIDUAL | AGENCY | LOCATION | COMMENTS |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |

REPORTED TO: .............................................................. POSITION: ................................................... LOCATION: ...........................................

ORGANISATION: ........................................................... DATE: ............................................................. PHONE: ....................................................

Note: The completed report and other information such as photos or information should be emailed to EPADispatch@epa.vic.gov.au

# Appendix B – Fish Death Investigation Report [Part B]

TIME / DATE FISHDEATH INVESTIGATED: ...................................................................................................................................................

HABITAT DESCRIPTION: (tick as appropriate)

1. Freshwater [ ]  Estuarine [ ]  Marine [ ]
2. Stream[ ]  River[ ]  Anabranch[ ]  Lake[ ]  Billabong[ ]  Swamp[ ]  Drain[ ]  Channel[ ]  Impoundment[ ]  Bay[ ]  Lagoon[ ]  Farm Dam [ ]  Beach[ ]  Open Ocean[ ]  Other:...............................................................................................

ADJACENT LAND USES (specify): ..........................................................................................................................................................................

PHYSICAL EVIDENCE OF POLLUTION (OR ALGAL BLOOMS) OBSERVED: ...............................................................................

ON-SITE WATER SAMPLING RESULTS WATER SAMPLES COLLECTED: Yes[ ]  No[ ]

Note: this is not intended to replace EPA sample submission forms.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Sample no. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| Sample ID |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Sampling site event/ upstream / downstream |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Depth: surface / middle / bottom |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| pH |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Temp. (oC) |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Dissolved Oxygen |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Conductivity |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Others (specify) |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

Attach map/diagram showing total area of fish death and sample sites. Colour photographs would also assist analysis and identification.

OTHER COMMENTS: (e.g. behaviour / appearance of fish) .........................................................................................

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| AFFECTED FISH SPECIES | LENGTH RANGE (cm) | NUMBERS | SAMPLES COLLECTED |
|  |  |  | Yes[ ]  No[ ]  |
|  |  |  | Yes[ ]  No[ ]  |
|  |  |  | Yes[ ]  No[ ]  |
|  |  |  | Yes[ ]  No[ ]  |

SUSPECTED CAUSE OF FISH DEATH: ..................................................................................................................................................................

WATER SAMPLES SENT TO: ............................................................... TO BE TESTED FOR: ......................................................................

FISH SAMPLES SENT TO: ..................................................................... TO BE TESTED FOR: .......................................................................

INVESTIGATED BY: ................................................................................... POSITION: ..............................................................................................

ORGANISATION: ......................................................................................... DATE: ........................................................................................................

RECOMMENDATION(S) FOR FUTURE ACTION: .............................................................................................................................................

Note: The completed report and other information such as photos or information should be emailed to EPADispatch@epa.vic.gov.au

# Appendix C – Key Contacts

| **Organisation** | **Role** | **Phone** | **Email** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Environment Protection Authority Victoria |  | 1300 EPA VIC1300 372 842 | EPADispatch@epa.vic.gov.au |
| Victorian Fisheries Authority | Operations Duty Officer | 0472 873 311 | Kylie.Wohlt@vfa.vic.gov.auoperations.dutyofficer@vfa.vic.gov.au |
| Agriculture Victoria, Emergency Animal Disease Hotline | Principal Veterinary Officer, Aquatica Animal Health | 0429 429 498 | tracey.bradley@agriculture.vic.gov.auCvo.victoria@agriculture.vic.gov.au |
| Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action |  |  | veronica.lanigan@delwp.vic.gov.auWater.emergency@delwp.vic.gov.au |
| Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action | Team Leader Marine Biodiversity | 0429 783 302 | Kimberley.Macdonald@delwp.vic.gov.au  |
| Parks Victoria | Director Fire, Emergency & Enforcement | 131 963 | David.nugent@parks.vic.gov.au |
| Parks Victoria | Manager Fire & Emergency Operations | 131 963 | Andrew.graystone@parks.vic.gov.au  |
| Department of Health |  |  | water@health.vic.gov.au |
| New South Wales Fishers Watch hotline |  | 1800 043 536 | information-advisory@dpi.nsw.gov.auFishers Watch [Report illegal fishing, fish kills or disease](https://urldefense.com/v3/__https%3A/www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/fishing/compliance/report-illegal-activity__;!!C5rN6bSF!BYKRgdGBiVeiiG_szuOFO9VUjVrcU5nwsM3MH8Vj70j4B1xJPrdwfrlltR92BxVD85jo_qznXX93HP3am9RJmwKX3fwbWY-SVw_Vxfxy$) |
| Murray Darling Basin Authority |  | 1800 230 067 | engagement@mdba.gov.au |
| Municipal Association Victoria | For information |  | inquiries@mav.asn.au |
| VicWater | For information |  | vicwater@vicwater.org.au |
| **Catchment Management Authorities** |
| Corangamite Catchment Management Authority | Estuaries and Environmental Water Project Officer | 0407 341 350 | rhiannon.glover@ccma.vic.gov.au info@ccma.vic.gov.au |
| East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority | Bec Hemming | 0438 510 190 | receptionegcma@egcma.com.au |
| Glenelg Hopkins Catchment Management Authority | Stephen Ryan | 0438 625 963 | s.ryan@ghcma.vic.gov.auGHCMA@ghcma.vic.gov.au |
| Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority | Mark Turner | (03) 5822 77050458 315 028 | markt@gbcma.vic.gov.aureception@gbcma.vic.gov.au |
| Mallee Catchment Management Authority | Nicole Wishart | 0427 514 303 | Nicole.wishart@malleecma.com.aufish@malleecma.com.au |
| Mallee Catchment Management Authority | James Kellerman | 0428 313 177 | James.kellerman@malleecma.com.aufish@malleecma.com.au |
| North Central Catchment Management Authority |  | (03) 5440 1850 | info@nccma.vic.gov.au |
| North East Catchment Management Authority | Executive Manager NRM Delivery | 1300 216 513 | necma@necma.vic.gov.au |
| West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority | Dan Garlick | 0400 175 085 | dang@wgcma.vic.gov.auwestgippy@wgcma.vic.gov.au |
| Wimmera Catchment Management Authority | Tony Baker, Statutory & Strategy Manager | (03) 5382 99180407 840 514 | bakert@wcma.vic.gov.auwcma@wcma.vic.gov.au  |
| **Urban Water Corporations** |
| Barwon Water | Duty Officer | 1300 656 007 | info@barwonwater.vic.gov.au |
| Central Highlands Water |  | 1800 061 514 | customer.enquiries@chw.net.au |
| Coliban Water |  | 1300 363 200 | coliban@coliban.com.au |
| East Gippsland Water |  | 1800 671 841 | egw@egwater.vic.gov.au |
| Gippsland Water |  | 1800 050 500 | contactus@gippswater.com.au |
| Goulburn Valley Water |  | (03) 5832 4800 | mail@gvwater.vic.gov.au |
| Melbourne Water |  | 131 722 | enquiry@melbournewater.com.au |
| South Gippsland Water |  | 1300 851 636 | sgwater@sgwater.com.au |
| Wannon Water |  | 1300 926 666 | info@wannonwater.com.au |
| Greater Western Water |  | 1300 650 422 |  |
| Westernport Water |  | 1300 720 711 | westport@westernportwater.com.au |
| **Regional Water Corporations** |
| Goulburn Murray Water | Manager Water Quality | 1800 064 184 | reception@gmwater.com.au |
| Grampians Wimmera Mallee Water |  | 1300 659 961 | westport@westernportwater.com.au |
| Lower Murray Water |  | 1800 808 830 | contactus@lmw.vic.gov.au |
| North East Water |  | 1300 361 644 | info@newater.com.au  |
| Southern Rural Water |  | 1300 139 510 | srw@srw.com.au |
| **Local Government** |
| Alpine Shire Council |  | 5755 0555 | info@alpineshire.vic.gov.au |
| Ararat Rural City Council |  | 5355 0200 | council@ararat.vic.gov.au |
| Ballarat City Council |  | 5320 5500 | ballcity@ballarat.vic.gov.au |
| Bass Coast Shire Council |  | 1300 BCOAST (226278)5671 2211 | basscoast@basscoast.vic.gov.au |
| Baw Baw Shire Council |  | 5624 2411 | bawbaw@bawbawshire.vic.gov.au |
| Benalla Rural City Council |  | 5760 2600 | council@benalla.vic.gov.au |
| Buloke Shire Council |  | 1300 520 520 | buloke@buloke.vic.gov.au |
| Campaspe Shire Council |  | 5481 2200 | shire@campaspe.vic.gov.au |
| Central Goldfields Shire Council |  | 5461 0610 | mail@cgoldshire.vic.gov.au |
| Colac Otway Shire Council |  | 5232 9400 | inq@colacotway.vic.gov.au |
| Corangamite Shire Council |  | 5593 7100 | shire@corangamite.vic.gov.au |
| East Gippsland Shire Council |  | 5153 9500 | feedback@egipps.vic.gov.au |
| Gannawarra Shire Council |  | 5450 9333 | council@gannawarra.vic.gov.au |
| Glenelg Shire Council |  | 5522 2200 | enquiry@glenelg.vic.gov.au |
| Golden Plains Shire Council |  | 5220 7111 | enquiries@gplains.vic.gov.au |
| Greater Bendigo City Council |  | 5434 6000 | info@bendigo.vic.gov.au |
| Greater Geelong City Council |  | 5272 5272 | COGGRecords@geelongcity.vic.gov.au |
| Greater Shepparton City Council |  | 5832 9700 | council@shepparton.vic.gov.au |
| Hepburn Shire Council |  | 5348 2306 | shire@hepburn.vic.gov.au |
| Hindmarsh Shire Council |  | 5391 4444 | info@hindmarsh.vic.gov.au |
| Horsham Rural City Council |  | 5382 9777 | council@hrcc.vic.gov.au |
| Indigo Shire Council |  | 5728 8000 | info@indigoshire.vic.gov.au |
| Latrobe City Council |  | 5128 5442 | latrobe@latrobe.vic.gov.au |
| Loddon Shire Council |  | 5494 1200 | loddon@loddon.vic.gov.au |
| Macedon Ranges Shire Council |  | 5422 0333 | mrsc@mrsc.vic.gov.au |
| Mansfield Shire Council |  | 5775 8555 | council@mansfield.vic.gov.au |
| Mildura Rural City Council |  | 5018 8100 | mrcc@mildura.vic.gov.au |
| Mitchell Shire Council |  | 5734 6200 | mitchell@mitchellshire.vic.gov.au |
| Moira Shire Council |  | 5871 9222 | info@moira.vic.gov.au |
| Moorabool Shire Council |  | 5366 7100 | info@moorabool.vic.gov.au |
| Mount Alexander Shire Council |  | 5471 1700 | info@mountalexander.vic.gov.au |
| Moyne Shire Council |  | 5568 0555 | moyne@moyne.vic.gov.au |
| Murrindindi Shire Council |  | 5772 0333 | msc@murrindindi.vic.gov.au |
| Northern Grampians Shire Council |  | 5358 8700 | ngshire@ngshire.vic.gov.au |
| Pyrenees Shire Council |  | 5349 1100 | pyrenees@pyrenees.vic.gov.au |
| Borough of Queenscliffe |  | 5258 1377 | info@queenscliffe.vic.gov.au |
| South Gippsland Shire Council |  | 5662 9200 | council@southgippsland.vic.gov.au |
| Southern Grampians Shire Council |  | 5573 0444 | council@sthgrampians.vic.gov.au |
| Strathbogie Shire Council |  | 5795 0000 | info@strathbogie.vic.gov.au |
| Surf Coast Shire Council |  | 5261 0600 | info@surfcoast.vic.gov.au |
| Swan Hill Rural City Council |  | 5036 2333 | council@swanhill.vic.gov.au |
| Towong Shire Council |  | (02)6071 5100 | info@towong.vic.gov.au |
| Wangaratta Rural City Council |  | 5722 0888 | council@wangaratta.vic.gov.au |
| Warrnambool City Council |  | 5559 4800 | wbool\_city@warrnambool.vic.gov.au |
| Wellington Shire Council |  | 1300 366 244 | enquiries@wellington.vic.gov.au |
| West Wimmera Shire Council |  | 5585 9900 | council@westwimmera.vic.gov.au |
| Wodonga City Council |  | (02)6022 9300 | info@wodonga.vic.gov.au |
| Yarriambiack Shire Council |  | 5398 0100 | info@yarriambiack.vic.gov.au |

Accessibility

Contact us if you need this information in an accessible format such as large print or audio.
Please telephone 1300 372 842 or email contact@epa.vic.gov.au

Interpreter assistance



If you need interpreter assistance or want this document translated, please call 131 450 and advise your preferred language. If you are deaf, or have a hearing or speech impairment, contact us through the National Relay Service.



   

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