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## Algae abundance concerns local

By Kim Fulton

A local woman is worried about the human and environmental health impacts of algae in the Mokihinui River near Chasm Creek but the West Coast Regional Council says the algal growth is natural and most likely harmless.

Frida Inta has been shocked in recent years at the buildup of algae and sludges at this time of year. On Sunday she went for a swim at the chasm.

"I have never seen the waters there look so shocking - the sludges and algae concentrations are unprecedented."

Above the farmed area further up the river, the shallow edge-waters had a small amount of algae but no severe buildup.

She first started swimming at the chasm many years ago, when the water was pristine all year round.

She said about 10 to 15 years ago a lot of farming development started occurring within the Seddonville valley, and had continued to the present, with stock numbers increasing and dry-stock supplanted by increased dairy. She connected the rise in late summer algal blooms with the farming expansion.

Most dairy effluent now discharged through a channel to near the confluence of Pages Stream within the chasm area, but the overflow at the settling pond site oozed directly into Coal Creek, which discharged into the Mokihinui River above the swimming area.

She thought there had also been an exponential rise in the amount of fertiliser being applied to paddocks.

She said the waters downstream of the discharges were highly eutrophied.

Eutrophication was created by intensive inputs of mainly nitrogen and phosphorus nutrients to waterways.

They came from a number of sources and in Seddonville the most obvious were direct input from dairy sheds and indirect inputs from pasture runoff, including cattle discharges, and fertilisers.

Algae thrived on those nutrients, and when the nutrients were used up, the algae died and created water depleted in oxygen, which could be lethal for fish.

She believed swimming at the chasm could also

be compromising people's health.

"It is imperative that this water is cleaned up, from the human health perspective and also from the environmental health perspective."

### Algae natural

West Coast Regional Council chief executive Chris Ingle said the algal growth was more likely to be a natural effect of a combination of unusually low river flows, a lack of any freshes (small floods), and extended periods of calm weather.

West Coast Regional Council resource scientist Jonny Horrox said it was incredibly dry in the area at the moment.

"When it's such stable, warm weather, the algae can just build up and build up and build up."

It would do that in any stream that had plenty of light, stable flows and sufficient nutrients.

There would have been algae buildup all over the district at the moment.

He didn't think swimmers should be concerned about the algae.

There were some sorts of algae that could cause itching or sickness in the worst-case scenario. However, the sorts of places where that algae was found on the Coast weren't generally places where people were swimming.

The main algae present at Chasm Creek would have been green filamentous algae, which was common all over the country and perfectly harmless.

"But people don't like it because it's unsightly and slimy."

The algae would affect the invertebrates in the creek - enough algae growing would change physical habitat and the species composition.

"This is all part of the seasonal cycles... these things are quite dynamic these systems. They're not always exactly the same."

He didn't have concerns that the farms in the area were causing the algal growth.

"As far as I'm aware they're all compliant up there... I don't think they're particularly large scale," he said.

"Additional nutrients, potentially from farming could help things along a bit, but really at the moment all creeks with a bit of sunlight will probably be building up algae...even some pretty pristine ones. It's mainly a product of this weather."



Scooter safety: Constable Jos Sturkenboom gave Westport South School students lessons on scooter safety yesterday.

The school thought the lessons would be a good idea since scooters are so popular at the moment and it seems as though they are here to stay.

Westport South School has separate areas marked out where younger and older children can ride their scooters. It also has specially made stands for them.

Mr Sturkenboom was showing students how to walk their scooters across the road after looking

carefully for cars. It was also important to look out for cars when crossing driveways, he said.

He told students they should walk on the inside of the footpath and make sure they shared the footpath with others. (Photo - Kim Fulton)

## Reefton races in Westport

By Ben Aulakh

A total of 158 horses will be hoping to trot their way to victory at the Reefton Races, to be held in Westport this Sunday.

Reefton Trotting Club president Tony Thomas said the decision to move the town's meet to Westport had been due to safety issues.

"It's due to our track conditions not recovering after the trotting meeting on December 30 and the galloping meeting on January 10, both racing on wet days.

"We levelled the track, reseeded the track. The grass is only just trying to strike now, and we have a racecourse inspector who inspects every venue before the races and he deemed it unsafe to race

on our Reefton track.

"There are some bare patches with no grass, so we're basically scared if it rained it would turn to mud. There's a safety issue and safety is paramount in racing."

However, Mr Thomas said with the number of nominations received for the event, there would be good fields across all the races.

Mr Thomas said he was grateful to the generosity of the Westport Trotting Club for allowing them to use the Patterson Park racecourse.

Johnny Reedy Jnr from the Westport Trotting Club said it was delighted to let Reefton use Patterson Park.

"They asked us if they could borrow it and we were more than happy to let them use it. We work

pretty closely with Reefton.

"Whatever each club needs to make it a success, we are prepared to do for each other."

Mr Thomas said the races with mobile starts would have fields of 14, while the big races would have fields of 16 competing.

The first race of the day was scheduled to start at 12.10pm, with the last race due to kick off at 5pm.

Mr Thomas was also hopeful people from Reefton would take advantage of transport being made available to get them to the event.

"We are putting on a free bus, and there'll be cars taking people who want a ride down to Westport. The bus leaves at 10.30am outside the visitor centre."

## Brightly coloured dogs on main street

By Ben Aulakh

Assorted coloured canines (pictured), have been popping up on pavements all along Palmerston Street.

The "no dog" signs have been spray painted onto the pavements to reinforce the rules governing when dogs are allowed to be walked along the street.

Under current rules dogs are not permitted on Palmerston Street between 9am and 5pm from Monday to Friday, and between 9am and 12pm on Saturdays.

However, Buller District Council senior animal control officer Tracy Judd said the current black, white and red metal signs, mounted on power poles, hadn't been enough for people to get the message.

"There are many signs everywhere, on every corner, but people are saying they are not seeing them."

"So we thought what else could we do show people that you can't bring your dog up the main street, we thought we'll do this."

The new spray-painted dogs come in a variety of colours, including luminous green white, yellow



and pink, "whatever paint was available," said Ms Judd. She said she has had a mixed response from people about the new signs.

"It's really interesting because I have had some people who are really unhappy about it, namely a few shop owners.

"And then I have had other people that come up while we're doing it saying 'it's about time, thank you for doing this, we don't want dogs up the street!'"

## Foot and mouth could be disaster

By Ben Aulakh and APNZ

A leading West Coast farmer has warned of the potentially devastating consequences a foot and mouth outbreak could have on cattle herds on the West Coast.

The auditor general said in a recent report he had identified weaknesses in New Zealand's readiness to handle a biosecurity outbreak such as foot and mouth disease.

The report said the Ministry of Primary Industries was not adequately prepared for dealing with incursions of high-risk organisms, labelling the ministry's planning as unrealistic and undeliverable.

Federated Farmers West Coast chairwoman Katie Milne said such an outbreak would have severe consequences.

"I presume the report is relating to previous incursions of PSA and things, and how well it got round without being able to be contained.

"In terms of what it would mean for the country... you have got to kill everything off, so it would be catastrophic for the West Coast and New Zealand, it would be economic destruction."

However, Ms Milne said such an outbreak could spread less quickly than other diseases which can be transferred more easily.

"Generally I would have thought if we got foot and mouth it would just be immediately stopping the movement of any stock.

"With livestock it would probably be a little bit easier with livestock than if it was airborne or insect borne."

Ms Milne also said she wasn't sure how well the

full effect of the disease on the farming industry had been examined.

"It has been analysed reasonably well, but how far through the flow-on effects have been calculated, right down to the bottom, they're probably too scared to do it."

A Reserve Bank report has estimated a foot and mouth outbreak would cost New Zealand's economy \$13 billion.

The report showed how, due to the mergers of government departments, responsibility for biosecurity had been passed on five times in nine years.

According to the report, in 2011 and 2012 spending on biosecurity activities was at the lowest level in five years.

Foot and mouth is an infectious viral disease that affects cloven-hoofed animals.

It causes a high fever for two or three days, followed by blisters inside the mouth and on the feet, which can rupture and cause lameness.

An outbreak of the virus in the UK in 2001 resulted in around seven million sheep and cattle being slaughtered in an eventually successful effort to halt the disease.

However, it's been estimated the outbreak cost the UK economy \$8 billion.

The report made a series of recommendations for a foot and mouth outbreak, and also suggested the ministry looks closely at its performance.

Minister for Primary Industries Nathan Guy said the report would be considered carefully by the Government.

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