



Government of Western Australia
Department of Fisheries

HAVE YOU SEEN A FISH KILL?

What is a fish kill?

What can you do if you see one?



What is a fish kill?

Fish kills are usually:

- A sudden and significant death of fish and other aquatic animals such as crabs or prawns.
- Characterised by a large number of aquatic animals dying over a short period of time and often within a particular area.
- Relatively common and frequently due to natural causes, but some are caused by human actions that affect the environment.

The occurrence and severity of a fish kill can vary according to the situation and how it is reported. If the cause can be identified, further fish deaths may be preventable. For this reason, it is very important that accurate data is gathered at the site of the fish kill by a trained officer.

Keep yourself safe

For your safety please **DO NOT**:

- Collect any samples.
- Consume any fish in the vicinity of the kill.
- Collect fish for bait.
- Come into contact with affected fish or water.

Also avoid any fishing or water activities in the area.

What can you do?

If you observe a fish kill please immediately report the incident to either your nearest Department of Fisheries or Department of Water Office (see list of contacts overleaf), or you can report it to the FishWatch service on **1800 815 507**.

Provide as much information as possible including:

- Your name, address and contact details (caller can remain anonymous if preferred).
- The exact location of the fish kill and the easiest access.
- The date and time you observed the event.
- An estimate of the number of fish affected.
- Sizes and species of fish affected.
- What state the fish are in (e.g. dead, dying, alive, very decayed, gasping at the surface, lesions).
- Whether there are any surface scums present (e.g. oil slicks, coloured water, rubbish) or odours in the vicinity.
- Any unusual activity that may have contributed to the event (e.g. dumping of chemicals or recent spraying).

A fish kill should be reported as soon as possible; dead fish decay quickly, water quality changes quickly and contaminated water could flow elsewhere. Speedy reporting can make a useful investigation possible.

Fish Kills

Conditions	Causes	Gross signs
Low dissolved oxygen	Algal blooms, eutrophic conditions, decomposition of organic matter, coral spawning, recent rains	Gulping at the surface, larger fish dying first – affects a range of species – particularly benthic, all sizes
Diseases	Stress caused by sub-optimal conditions (secondary disease) and primary disease due to susceptibility to a particular pathogen	Bleeding on the skin surface, lesions, flashing behaviour, growths; inability to maintain buoyancy – affects the same or various species
Sunburn	Animals caught in shallow water	White patches of peeling skin – mainly surface-dwelling species
Life cycle	Spawning (fish or coral)	Natural death after spawning, same species and same size animals, re-occurring event
Poisoning and chemical pollution	Lethal and sub-lethal effects	Affects a large range of species
Sudden change in physical water parameters	Drop in salinity, dissolved oxygen, pH due to large rainfall in saline water, habitat disturbance; change in water temperatures; turbidity and dissolved solids	Usually affects species that are territorial and or unable to get away from the adverse conditions

Contacts

Location	Department	Phone
Albany	Fisheries	(08) 9845 7444
Broome	Fisheries	(08) 9193 8600
Bunbury	Water	(08) 9726 4111
Busselton	Water	(08) 9781 0188
Carnarvon	Fisheries	(08) 9941 1185
Denham	Fisheries	(08) 9948 1210
Esperance	Fisheries	(08) 9071 1839
Exmouth	Fisheries	(08) 9949 2755
Geraldton	Fisheries	(08) 9920 8400
Jurien Bay	Fisheries	(08) 9652 1048
Karratha	Fisheries	(08) 9144 4337
	Water	(08) 9144 0200
Kununurra	Water	(08) 9166 4100
Mandurah	Fisheries	(08) 9583 7800
	Water	(08) 9550 4222
Pemberton	Fisheries	(08) 9776 1044
Perth (Fremantle)	Fisheries	(08) 9432 8000
Perth (City)	Department of Water Head Office	(08) 6364 7600
	Department of Water Incident Co-ordinator	0417 987 537
	Swan River Trust After hours river emergency	0419 192 845
Perth	Department of Fisheries (Fish Health Unit)	(08) 9368 3357 0409 373 063

Further information

DEPARTMENT OF FISHERIES

Fish Health Laboratories

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FISHWATCH



1800-815-507

Fish for the future