

# Have you seen a fish kill?



Photo: Shane Herriot

**What is a fish kill?**

**What to do if you see one!**



Department of  
Fisheries

*Fish for the future*

## 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 defined 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 kills 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.

## SAFETY!

For your safety please **DO NOT:**

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

## What should you report?

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).

## 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 sublethal 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

## 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), or you can report it to the FishWatch service on **1800 815 507**.

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.

Location	Department	Phone
Albany	DoF	(08) 9841 7766
Broome	DoF	(08) 9193 8600
Bunbury	DoW	(08) 9726 4111
Busselton	DoW	(08) 9781 0106
Carnarvon	DoF	(08) 9941 1185
Denham	DoF	(08) 9948 1210
Esperance	DoF	(08) 9071 1839
Exmouth	DoF	(08) 9949 2755
Geraldton	DoF	(08) 9921 6800
Jurien Bay	DoF	(08) 9652 1048
Karratha	DoW/DoF	(08) 9144 2000 or (08) 9144 4337
Kununurra	DoW	(08) 9166 4100
Kwinana	DoW	(08) 9411 1788
Mandurah	DoW/DoF	(08) 9550 4222 or (08) 9432 8000
Pemberton	DoF	(08) 9776 1044
Perth (Fremantle)	DoF	(08) 9432 8000
Perth (City)	DoW SRT	(08) 9278 0900 After hours river emergency: 0419 192 845
Perth (Fish Health Section) Fish kill mobile	DoF	(08) 9368 3357 or 0409 373 063 0438 102 307

DoF: Department of Fisheries, DoW: Department of Water, SRT: Swan River Trust

## For further information please contact the Fish Health Laboratories

3 Baron-Hay Court, South Perth WA 6151

Kylie Chatfield: (08) 9368 3286

Email: [kchatfield@agric.wa.gov.au](mailto:kchatfield@agric.wa.gov.au)

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Email: [phillier@agric.wa.gov.au](mailto:phillier@agric.wa.gov.au)

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