



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

Friday 11 May 2012

### **No easy answer to water quality problems in Lake Burley Griffin**

The ailing water quality in Lake Burley Griffin will nurture blue green algal blooms for the next 20 years unless the situation is rectified, according to the *Report on the state of water courses and catchments for Lake Burley Griffin*.

The findings of the report, prepared by the Office for the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment, identifies that it will take consistent and persistent efforts by Government and communities to improve the water quality.

The problem has been caused by historical and current management of the urban landscape and catchments. Organic matter entering the lake has increased the level of nutrients which, in turn, has built up lake sediment over an extended period of time. These nutrients have promoted the growth of blue green algae in the lake.

ACT Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment Robert Neil says there is currently enough nutrients in lake sediment to fuel blue green algae growth for the next two decades.

“The issue is a complex one – including in-lake chemical processes and catchment management across jurisdictions and government agencies – any lasting improvements are likely to take time before we see results,” the Commissioner said.

“The overall condition of the lake, as an urban body of water, is generally good and the lake functions well in controlling pollution which helps maintain water quality downstream of the lake in the Molonglo River.

“However, if we don’t put in place measures to ensure the lake’s health, there is a continuing threat that Lake Burley Griffin water quality will continue to deteriorate and succumb to the same issues as Lake Tuggeranong, which is often overrun with blue green algae.

“There are actions being taken by Governments and local councils, but more needs to be done if we are going to see a positive change for future generations.”

Treated sewage effluent also contributes to poor water quality but generally these sources are minor compared to the diffuse sources of bacterial contamination, flushed from catchments during rain.

“With increasing urbanization in Canberra, Queanbeyan and nearby rural catchments, maintaining water quality suitable for activities such as swimming is become increasingly difficult with the need for more frequent lake closures necessary to safeguard public health,” Commissioner Neil said.

The report acknowledges the role of the lake as a key iconic component of the identity of the national capital and notes the high amenity, aesthetics, recreation and tourism values Canberrans place on it. The report looks at the issues and causes that compromise those values.