



MEDIA RELEASE

4 October 2016

REPORT PROPOSES RIVERBANK REHABILITATION AND BOATING RESTRICTIONS TO AVOID DRINKING WATER THREAT

Temporary boating restrictions on the Seaham Weir Pool and a bank rehabilitation program are required to save the riverbanks of the Williams River from chronic erosion, according to an independent study.

Seaham Weir Pool is a 25 kilometre section of the Williams River stretching from Seaham Weir to Clarence Town. The Weir Pool is the primary source of water supplied to Grahamstown Dam, which provides water to around half of all homes in the Hunter region.

A Transport for NSW and Hunter Water commissioned study by the University of NSW has found that 75% of the Seaham Weir Pool's riverbanks are eroded and deteriorating, and that one of the main causes is waves from boats primarily used for wakeboarding and waterskiing.

Hunter Water Chief Operating Officer Darren Cleary said that left unchecked, erosion of riverbanks along Seaham Weir Pool would significantly increase the cost of producing drinking water at Grahamstown Water Treatment Plant.

"More than 20 years of data shows the water quality within the Seaham Weir Pool is worse than other locations and unfortunately, it's deteriorating.

"Riverbank erosion increases turbidity and nutrient concentrations in the water. Nutrients, such as phosphorus, can cause potentially toxic algal blooms, while particles in turbid water can provide a point of attachment to other pollutants, including bacterium.

"The declining water quality in Seaham Weir Pool means each year more than five tonnes of phosphorus is unavoidably transferred from the Weir Pool into Grahamstown Dam. And it's getting worse, with the Weir Pool experiencing a 50% increase in phosphorus levels over the past 25 years.

"This report shows erosion in Seaham Weir Pool is increasing, and has recommended a management plan to revegetate the riverbanks, keep cattle away from the river and temporarily restrict some boating while the banks are restored.

"The study also reports over the past three years alone, Seaham Weir Pool has suffered enough collapsed riverbank to fill 22 shipping containers with turf, much of which winds up in Grahamstown Dam.

"The waves caused by speedboats undercut the riverbank, causing trees and turf to collapse into the River.

"While Hunter Water acknowledges that the boating restrictions will cause inconvenience to some, the health of the Weir Pool and the impact on our drinking water need to take precedence." he said.

The Seaham Weir Pool Riverbank Vulnerability Assessment is on public exhibition with NSW RMS here - <http://www.rms.nsw.gov.au/projects/hunter/williams-river/index.html>. Hunter Water encourages residents to read the report and make a submission in favour of the recommendations.