QUESTION ON NOTICE

No. 602

asked on Tuesday 10 May 2005

MRS PRATT ASKED THE MINISTER FOR NATURAL RESOURCES AND MINES (MR ROBERTSON)—

QUESTION:

With reference to the on-going dry weather promoting the growth of blue-green algae in rural dams, such as Gordonbrook dam at Kingaroy, which is used for the town's drinking water—

(1) What is the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) doing to help, prevent or treat levels of toxicity in these dams down to an acceptable level, and by what means is it doing that?

(2) What level of cell counts are acceptable for drinking water in cells/ml to each 1 million litres of water in each dam and what is the current rate?

(3) At the Gordonbrook, Wivenhoe, and Somerset dams in the Nanango Electorate how much has the toxicity level increased each month, month by month, for each of these three dams?

(4) What effect does the DNR attribute to agricultural run-off on the toxic levels of blue and green algae at these dams and rural dams in general?

(5) How limited is the testing of blue-green algae in dams when water levels drop to minimum levels given the dryness of the rivers and water catchment areas that feed these dams?

(6) What is the current maximum level of cells/ml recorded and what dam was that recorded at?

ANSWER:

(1) Algal blooms are common seasonal events occurring throughout Queensland. The Queensland Government has published the Queensland Harmful Algal Bloom Responses Plan and the Queensland Harmful Algal Bloom Operational Procedures. These documents outline a multi-agency approach to managing algal blooms. Officers of my Department and other agencies are always available to provide advice on algal management to storage managers on request.

(2) The Australian Drinking Water Guidelines do not prescribe algal cell counts that are acceptable in drinking water. They prescribe a guideline value for the level of the blue-green algal toxin, microcystin, in drinking water, which is 1.3 micrograms per litre.

(3) My Department does not have a direct role in the operation and management of Gordonbrook, Wivenhoe and Somerset dams. Gordonbrook dam is owned and operated by Kingaroy Shire Council and Wivenhoe and Somerset dams are owned and operated by SEQWater.

(4) Algal blooms result from light, temperature and nutrient interactions in storages. As a contributor of nutrients, agricultural run-off can have significant impact on algal growth.

(5) Testing methods will still be applicable as water levels in storages fall.

(6) Specific information on actual cell numbers and toxin levels should be sought from the organisations responsible for dam management.