Lyngbya

What is Lyngbya?
Lyngbya (pronounced ‘ling-bee-ya’) is a cyanobacterium named after the colour ‘cyan’, meaning ‘blue’. Lyngbya is commonly referred to as a ‘blue-green alga’ because it:

- has a blue-greenish appearance under the microscope;
- looks and behaves like algae; and,
- has other characteristics that are typical for both bacteria and algae

Where does Lyngbya live?
Lyngbya lives and grows on the bottom of a range of different shallow waterways where it forms slimy mats that have a dark green-black appearance. These mats can become buoyant and eventually float to the surface. When floating and exposed to sunlight, they start to decompose, becoming pungent and unsightly, and can wash up and accumulate on beaches.

Is Lyngbya toxic?
Yes and No! Most blue-green algae are toxic and this also holds true for some Lyngbya species (there are more than 20 species).

The toxicity of Lyngbya depends on the strain and environmental triggers, and the presence of toxins can only be determined by specialist laboratories.

Precaution is a must, as contact with Lyngbya may cause skin irritation, nausea and vomiting. Dried material (as found on beaches, for example) has been suspected to cause respiratory problems.

What should I do if I find Lyngbya?
- do not touch Lyngbya;
- stay away from Lyngbya-affected waters or areas;
- if you have come in contact with Lyngbya and develop any symptoms (such as skin irritation or nausea), rinse off with a lot of water and soap and seek medical advice; and
- inform local authorities;
  - where you have seen it;
  - if it smells;
  - estimate the size of the affected area; and
  - take a clear photo if you have a camera available.

Past blooms in the Peel-Harvey Catchment:
- November 2000 and early 2001 in the Peel Inlet.

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