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Probe into waste water discharge

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THE Water Corporation is being investigated over its release of treated waste water into Seven Mile Creek last month.

The Corporation released the water despite failing to win approval from the Department of Environment.

More than 95 megalitres were released into the creek from one of two holding dams at the Corporation's Albany tree farm.

"We are conducting an investigation into possible breaches of their licence," said DEC's regional leader of industry regulation Carol Goodbourn.

"There is still a lot of evidence to be gathered.

"After that investigation is completed, a decision will be made in line with the DEC's enforcement policy."

Landowners and environmentalists voiced their concerns this week.

Graders and food producers along the creek are worried about the possible impact.

The Torbay Catchment Group said more information about the treated water was required.

"They seek approval to release the water, are injected and they go ahead and do it anyway. What does that tell you?" said Torbay Catchment Group acting chairman Phil Mellon.

"What about the nitrogen and phosphate levels in the waste water?"

"We have written letters to the Water Corporation and Department of Environment asking questions to that effect.

"We're still waiting.

"It's okay to offer bacterial monitoring, but elevated phosphate levels create algal blooms.

"This treated water ends up in Lake Powell which is an A Class Reserve and could pose a threat to native vegetation.

"It can't be good for fish stocks."

The Corporation moved to allow farms yesterday.

Regional business manager David Hughes-Owen said there was no health or safety threat from the discharged water.

"By the time this water entered the environment it had already been biologically treated and stored in a dam where it was waiting to be irrigated onto our crops of blue gums near the airport," he said.

The Corporation was forced to discharge the water to prevent damage to its two dams.

"A one-in-10-year rainfall event in November last year put pressure on the storage capacity of the dams," Mr Hughes-Owen said.

"Despite our best efforts to manage the situation, this initial overload, combined with an extremely wet winter, created the possibility of an overflow.

"Our tree farm was designed to allow a controlled release of this nature.

"It's a bit like a safety valve, and there has been one other occasion back in 2005 when

we had to take this action."

Up to eight megalitres were released each day between September 5 and 17.

"We knew this was on the cards, so we made modifications to our pipes to ensure the release was controlled and metered," Mr Hughes-Owen said.

"It's important to note that this release was from our No 2 dam, which has had large amounts of stormflow water from the rains."

Mr Hughes-Owen said the discharge had a minimal impact on water quality downstream from the tree farms.

"Bacterial sampling had shown the quality was within normal limits for this time of year," he said.

"Water quality monitoring is carried out regularly throughout the year at Seven Mile Creek."

Nitrogen, phosphate and E.Coli levels were tested.

"During the discharge of highly-treated waste water that had also been heavily diluted by Albany's extremely wet winter, monitoring showed a negligible increase in nutrients," Mr Hughes-Owen said.

He said the release lowered the dam levels enough to allow the Corporation to better manage flows beyond next winter.

It would also give it time to develop long-term strategies for dealing with any possible future overflows.

Mr Hughes-Owen said the Corporation would continue to work with the DEC during its investigation.

WEEKEND WEATHER Friday: Possible shower 17C