

Trichodesmium

Our subtropical climate in Ballina Shire provides warm and sunny conditions that can contribute to Trichodesmium blooming in our waters.



What is it?

Trichodesmium are cyanobacteria (blue-green algae) that appear naturally in tropical and subtropical ocean waters and are commonly known as sea sawdust, whale sperm, whale food and sea scum.

Trichodesmium is a member of the phytoplankton family, and plays an important role in the aquatic food chain.

Normally Trichodesmium are barely visible to the naked eye, but in water that has been calm for long periods it begins to float like sawdust on the surface.

Combinations of calm conditions, northerly currents and warm water temperatures can increase growth and even discolour the water.

Blooms in
Ballina Shire are most
common between
August and December

What to look for

You may have noticed a bloom washed up on a beach or in an estuary area. There may also be an unpleasant 'fishy' smell. Wind and current conditions often cause large amounts of Trichodesmium to group together.

Trichodesmium blooms can cause water to appear rust-coloured but traces of grey, green and purple streaks can also be visible.

Don't panic

Blooms generally disappear in a few days.

If you come into contact with Trichodesmium it can easily be rinsed off the skin.

Further Information

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