Algae Blooms on the Coast *(Trichodesmium)*

What is it?

If you see what looks an oil/paint slick or a discoloured foam on a beach between August and December, it is likely to be a bloom of Trichodesmium. Trichodesmium are cyanobacteria (also known as blue-green algae) that appear naturally in tropical and subtropical waters. Trichodesmium plays a critical role in the aquatic food chain, and are sometimes referred to as sea spawn or sea scum.

Trichodesmium are often barely visible, but where water has been calm for long periods it floats on the surface and resembles sawdust. When conditions are right (calm seas, northerly currents, and warm water temperatures), Trichodesmium can grow and form larger, visible 'blooms' on the surface of the ocean. These blooms can be rust coloured, grey, green, or purple. In stagnant conditions, Trichodesmium can also release a pigment that changes the colour of the water to whitish or pale pink.

Trichodesmium blooms are not generally harmful, but it can look unsightly. The most common concern about the algae is a putrid 'fishy' odour.

What do I need to do about it?

The concentration of Trichodesmium in natural systems, like the ocean, is typically not high enough to be harmful. Blooms will usually disappear within several days, and it can easily be washed off with running water if you come into contact with it. It is still best to avoid affected areas to be safe, however.

Trichodesmium blooms are a natural occurrence and there is almost never a need for Council to take action. If you are concerned that a Trichodesmium bloom is having an impact on human or ocean health, contact Council on (07) 4913 5000.

Trichodesmium or Coral Spawn?

Trichodesmium is often confused with coral spawn, but there are a few key differences:

- Trichodesmium has a stronger, more 'fishy' smell whereas coral spawn has a less intense scent and smells more like the ocean; and
- Coral spawn 'slicks' persist for no more than two days, whereas Trichodesmium blooms can last much longer.

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