



Research lets farmers off algae hook

New research linking algal blooms to water stratification, and claiming climate change is more likely than fertilisers to affect river health, is a welcome breakthrough for farmers.

Agricultural Region MLC Brian Ellis, whose family farms at Bindi Bindi, said that the Labor Government had been slow to manage WA rivers and had been quick to shift the blame to farmers.

This was especially galling, given that the Government's Fertiliser Action Plan had been compiled without farmer input.

"I am sure farmers throughout the Agricultural Region will join me in welcoming new UWA research which shows that algal blooms occur when river water forms layers of differing temperatures or salinity," Mr Ellis said.

"UWA Professor Jorg Imberger has reportedly blasted the State Government and Swan River Trust for their blinkered approach to managing the river.

"I am calling on the Minister for the Environment to open his eyes to this new research so that the implied responsibility for cleaning up the river does not only fall on the farmers.

"City gardeners use high water-soluble fertilisers at a rate that is 20 or 30 times the rate used by farmers, and the EPA's draft report on the management of the Peel Inlet suggests that a 22 per cent reduction in phosphorus could be achieved if all homes were connected to sewerage.

"While the Carpenter Government has been pointing the finger at the farmyard it has practically abandoned the infill sewer-

age program brought in by the Court Government, and I believe it should start by fixing its own backyard.

"Slow-release fertilisers are expected to cost farmers an additional 20 to 30 per cent, and this is a huge burden for them to bear when they are already stretched to the limit by drought.

"There is also the need to reintroduce more native plants along the river banks as their tannins help break down the nutrients.

"I agree with Prof Imberger, and Shadow Environment Minister Dr Steve Thomas, that our river management needs a holistic approach.

"The Carpenter Government has obviously been caught on the trot by this new research, but should bite the bullet and give it serious consideration."