

Iron Bacteria

If you have seen a reddish-brown sediment, stain or substance in your local waterway or stormwater drains, don't be alarmed. The chances are that this is being caused by iron bacteria, which is a naturally occurring micro-organism.



The bacteria oxidises the iron (or manganese) in the presence of dissolved oxygen which forms a rust, hence the colour.

When flows are low it accumulates, but it clears up when sufficient flows can flush it away. During the initial phases of iron bacteria activity, there may be a decaying swamp smell and an oily appearance on the surface of the water. There should not be a smell of petrol, oil, sewerage or chemicals.

The oily appearance is merely attributed to the harmless chemical reaction taking place in the water and "fractures" when it is broken with a stick which distinguished it from other forms of oily substances.



Places where you are most likely to see iron bacteria

- On rocks near waterfalls
- Where sandstone has been crushed and used as fill for roads etc
- On steep slopes where water seeps out of the ground
- Creeks that are fed by groundwater (water flowing under the surface).

Further information on water pollution can be found on council's website:

<http://www.wsc.nsw.gov.au/services/environment/environmental-information/pollution-information/whats-that-in-the-water->

If you are concerned, call the EPA Pollution Line on 13 15 55 or Council (02) 4868 0888.