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Brown Tide Linked to Pollution and Over-Development Environmentalists Demand Stronger Shore Protections

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Loch Arbour, NJ – As public concern mounts over an expanding “brown tide” algal bloom extending from Raritan and Sand Hook Bays to the Manasquan Inlet, New Jersey environmentalists called on the Corzine Administration to embrace an ecosystem based management policy and stronger shore and water quality protection measures.

The major algal bloom occurred just days after state officials publicly forecasted good water quality and abundant seafood this summer.

“Brown tides are an indicator of poor water quality and potential ecosystem collapse – this is the Shore’s plea for help,” said **Benson Chiles of the Coastal Ocean Coalition**. “This episode should serve as a wake up call that NJ’s bays and beaches remain threatened by pollution and over-development.”

“DEP has been tasked with protecting our natural resources but their failure to adopt an ecosystem based management policy as well as the non-enforcement of current authority is tantamount to selling our shore to the highest bidder,” said **Mike PISAURO, Legislative director of the New Jersey Environmental Lobby**. “Unless DEP takes an aggressive and holistic approach to protecting our coast and oceans, they may find that there may not be much left to protect.”

Brown tides have been linked to pollution and can cause serious ecological, fisheries and water quality threats. According to a 2000 DEP Report¹:

¹ <http://www.state.nj.us/dep/dsr/browntide/hab2.PDF> “Harmful Algal Blooms in Coastal Waters of NJ.”

“Harmful algal blooms are an increasing phenomenon throughout the coastal waters of the world. There have been recurring algal blooms in the coastal waters of New Jersey documented over the last twenty years. Harmful algal blooms (HABs) include species of microscopic, usually single celled eukaryotic plants that live in estuarine and marine waters....

When a given species of algae blooms and imparts a particular color to the water, due to the pigments they contain, they are known as “red tides”, “green tides”, or “brown tides”. These algal blooms can cause numerous ecological and/or human health problems due to the toxins produced by the species and/or their potential bioaccumulation in the food web, or due to the degradation of blooms which may cause hypoxic (low levels of dissolved oxygen in water) conditions”

“The State of New Jersey’s failure to address over -development, storm water, and nutrients has caused the Tide to Turn at the Jersey Shore,” stated **Jeff Tittel, Director of NJ Sierra Club.**

There is general agreement among scientists that increasing sewage treatment plant discharges and runoff of nutrient pollution from land-based sources are a major cause of the global increase in harmful algal blooms (HABs) (Glibert et al. 2005).

“For years, reducing nitrogen inputs has been the focus of work in Chesapeake Bay and Long Island Sound,” said **Bill Wolfe of NJ PEER.** “In southwest Florida, analysis of algae from beaches closely matched wastewater nitrogen discharged by sewage treatment plants, suggesting the importance of the river discharges in transporting wastewater nitrogen loads.”

“It’s time for NJ to stop downplaying the problem and begin developing standards, monitoring programs, and regulatory actions to reduce nitrogen pollution loadings to our coastal waters” concluded **Wolfe.**

The Bayshore Regional Watershed Council, an all-volunteer organization, expressed frustration about the length of time it took NJDEP to notify the public about the occurrence of a brown tide in the Sandy Hook Bay-Raritan Bay region, saying: “We believe officials within NJDEP knew about this alga bloom days before the Memorial Day weekend, yet waited until after the holiday to send out a press release to alert the general public. As more people desire to live in and visit the Jersey Shore, there is an absolute need now to get people educated and more informed about coastal issues that affect their lives.”

This seems like a case of shifting baselines, where 20 years ago and brown algae bloom would have been cause for alarm, whereas today the State says this is normal,” said **John Weber of the Surfrider Foundation.** Shifting baselines are dangerous and make us forget how a normal ecosystem behaves.”

"My 5 year old went swimming in the ocean in Belmar Saturday and by lunchtime Sunday had significant nausea. Whether the brown tide caused that or not, New Jersey needs to do a better job protecting the jewel that is the Jersey Shore. Hopefully, the silver lining to this outbreak will be that it catalyzes state action," said **David Pringle of the NJ Environmental Federation.**

Other signatories to this release include:

**NJ Audubon Society
Environment New Jersey**

Additional Resources:

<http://www.bayshorewatershed.org/bw/Announcements/Yucky%20Brown%20Tide%20in%20Sandy%20Hook%20Bay>, pictures and descriptions of brown tide outbreak in Sandy Hook Bay.

http://www.peer.org/docs/fl/06_17_10_lee_cty_report.pdf, Report from Florida highlighting the harmful nature of algal blooms

<http://www.state.nj.us/dep/dsr/browntide/bt.htm>, DEP "Browntide" page

<http://www.state.nj.us/dep/dsr/browntide/hab2.PDF>, Report on harmful algal blooms in NJ

http://www.helcom.fi/environment2/ifs/ifs2006/en_GB/phyto/, paper describing potential effects of Dactylosoline, a type diatom

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