



## MEDIA RELEASE

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### Brisbane student honoured for helping rescue the world's rivers

A 27 year old University of Queensland PhD student whose research has slowed the rapid growth of toxic blue-green algae in South East Queensland is one of five young Australian scientists recognised for improving the outlook of the world's rivers.

Kathleen Ahern, a finalist in the 2008 *Riversymposium* Young Water Scientist Award (in partnership with GHD), joins four other young Australian scientists acknowledged for their innovation in water conservation and management. Ms Ahern is in the running to win \$3000 and will present a paper outlining her project at the 11<sup>th</sup> International *Riversymposium* in Brisbane on Monday 1 September, 2008.

Ms Ahern showed through her research that if iron, phosphorus and nitrogen levels continue to increase in Moreton Bay as predicted, the size of toxic blue-green algae blooms is likely to increase.

Toxic blue-green algae is a type of marine bacteria which occurs naturally but becomes a problem when massive growth occurs, particularly in the summer months. The algae can threaten fish, human health, ecosystems and the recreational use of beaches and bays.

Her study brought to life how quickly the algae can spread, showing toxic blue-green algae in Deception Bay grew from 40 tonnes to a massive 5057 tonnes in less than two months during 2005.

Ms Ahern's research contributed to the Queensland Government decision to introduce a new *Algal Blooms* policy aimed at limiting the nutrients entering South East Queensland waterways to reduce the frequency and intensity of toxic blue-green algae in coastal waters.

Other finalists vying for the Award include James Neal (Sydney) Kylie Catterall (Gold Coast), Kasper Johansen (Brisbane) and Thang Nam Do (Vietnam). Their projects include research to improve water use on dairy farms and a new warning system which rapidly detects wastewater treatment problems.

GHD Business Manager (Water and Environment) Ross Fryar said the company is proud to partner with the International *Riversymposium* and support the development of the prestigious Award.

"As a large engineering and architecture company, GHD understands the future challenges faced in managing our environmental footprint and we recognize the opportunity to bring together a range of professionals working to achieve better outcomes," Mr Fryar said.

"GHD became involved in the Award because at any time one quarter of our business is involved in a water project somewhere in the world. Our goal is to build interest among other students and encourage more to enter in coming years."



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Riverfestival is an initiative of Brisbane City Council and the Queensland Government



# RIVERSYMPOSIUM

BRISBANE, AUSTRALIA

The Award was established in 1998 and has evolved into a prestigious annual event to celebrate the excellence of young Australian water scientists.

The 11<sup>th</sup> International *Riversymposium* in partnership with GHD will present the winner of the 2008 Young Water Scientist Award during the morning plenary session on Wednesday 3 September.

More information on the Award and the 11<sup>th</sup> International *Riversymposium: A Future of Extremes* can be found at [www.riversymposium.com](http://www.riversymposium.com).

**ENDS**

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