

# Sewage leak blamed for pollution

## Umgeni culvert a 'cesspool'

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**S**OME of Durban's biggest rivers and the hundreds of storm water outlets that drain into them could be to blame for poor beach water quality that has bedevilled the city's Blue Flag programme.

Water and Sanitation Engineers were yesterday again dispatched to investigate a massive sewage leak in the Umgeni Road region, after locals there spotted thousands of litres flowing into a massive storm water culvert.

Home to a nursery of small eels and fish, the culvert was instead transformed into a stinking cesspool as used toilet paper, condoms and raw sewage rushed down it.

One of the biggest storm water culverts in the Umgeni Road area, it acts as a catchment to dozens of smaller storm water pipes before spilling into the Umgeni River near the North Coast Road flyover.

A man who works in the area, but declined to use his name, said the spill appeared to come from a storm water drain in the Alpine Road area, which runs near a sewage pump station.

"It seems to have dried up in

the last few days, but for three weeks prior to that we had all sorts flowing down.

"You could smell the thing and when we had a look, the culvert was flowing from bank to bank with really horrible matter," he said.

Tellingly, the culvert is not far from the site of a recent fish kill that outraged Durban North competitive angler Ron Hibbert. Hibbert and a friend spotted hundreds of dead mullet not far from the outlet two weekends ago, after wading through "stinking" river bank mud and water.

### Contamination

Meanwhile, water samples taken by the *Daily News* at both the region of the fish kill and in the culvert indicate massive *E. coli* faecal contamination.

Tests conducted by Umgeni Water laboratories proved that the sample collected near the fish kill area showed 470 colony forming units (cfu) of *E. coli* contamination. The culvert water contained 4838 cfu.

Water quality standards generally dictate that drinking water should have no *E. coli* in it, while a 130 cfu threshold is accepted for recreational water sports.

Meanwhile, the city has ad-

mitted that sewage leaks have been at an all-time high in the past month.

Water and Sanitation deputy head of operations Ednick Msweli said load-shedding and the violent storm that lashed parts of Durban about a month ago could be to blame for the frequent sewage leaks.

"Load-shedding and the storm has really affected us. The outcry has been recent. We didn't have many fish kills until recently," Msweli said.

But details of what is believed to be a water study on local beaches and rivers has yet to be made public or acted on.

Compiled by CSIR microbiologist Elizabeth Simpson, the report takes an in-depth look at Durban's pollution problems.

It was handed to city manager Dr Michael Sutcliffe almost three weeks ago, at the height of his public spat with Blue Flag national co-ordinator Alison Kelly.

DA councillor and vocal Blue Flag supporter Geoff Pullan is now preparing to take the matter to the highest authorities and committees in council.

"All parties are concerned with the state of our rivers and beaches and that they are not up to international standards," Pullan said.

