

## River health expert questions Liberal irrigation plan

# Doubt on Derwent dam

By SUE BAILEY

A TASMANIAN aquatic environmental specialist has cast serious doubt on a Liberal Party plan to build a \$25 million weir and spillway across the Derwent River at Bridgewater.

Peter Davies, a research fellow at the University of Tasmania and co-ordinator of the National River Health Program, last night said the

health of the entire Derwent estuary would be at risk from the plan.

"In the last four or five months we have only just become aware of how important the marshes upstream from the Bridgewater Bridge really are," Dr Davies said.

"The seagrass meadows and algal communities are key elements in the functioning of the entire river.

"There would be a major risk to the middle and lower

Derwent estuary if you blocked saltwater going north."

Dr Davies said the spread of algal blooms could make water quality suffer, and there could be fish deaths and odours in the Derwent River south of Bridgewater.

Deputy Liberal leader Rene Hidding urged the State Government to consider the plan as a way to provide irrigation to the drought-stricken south-east

basin. However, Dr Davies stressed the importance of doing an environmental impact study.

"My main concern is that an environmental impact study should be done and that an expectation has been raised in the community that this will have minimal effect," he said.

"The issue here is the tidal marshes which are very sensitive to salinity.

"It would place extra stress

when the river is already struggling to handle sewage and industrial discharge."

Dr Davies was worried that expectations had been raised of providing freshwater when the environmental effects had not been considered.

"I'm very concerned at the trade-off," he said.

"The Coal River provided irrigation but the oyster and shellfish industries have suffered."