

The Advertiser

SA Premier Peter Malinauskas plays down algal bloom crisis ahead of March election

South Australia's Premier has accused the media of "driving fear" over the intensity of the algal bloom crisis, just weeks before voters head to polls.



Shashi Baltutis

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South Australian Premier Peter Malinauskas has played down the algal bloom gripping parts of the coastline ahead of the March state election, citing a reluctance to "incite fear".

Mr Malinauskas declared the bloom, which had left people sick and killed millions of sea creatures, non-existent in the majority of the state.

It came after The Advertiser revealed on Sunday swathes of Yorke Peninsula beaches resembled a "marine Chernobyl" as tens of thousands of dead animals washed ashore and usually blue water changed colour after the "hotspot" intensified over the past three weeks.

The cluster, which readings published on Saturday showed was among the worst of SA's almost year-long algal crisis, worsened since the New Year in the Spencer Gulf along the Peninsula's south from Corny Point to Marion Bay including Innes National Park.

When asked on Monday if it was the government's strategy to play down the algal bloom ahead of South Australians heading to the polls on March 21, Mr Malinauskas accused the media of "driving fear into the community" over the issue.

"Is it your strategy to unnecessarily play it up so as to drive fear into the community even though it doesn't exist in the majority of metropolitan Adelaide? I don't know," he said.

"All we're doing, is publicly releasing the detail and science and the information as soon as we get it."

The government last conducted a specific algal press conference on January 8.

“We’ve got to speak honestly and plainly about the algal bloom which is to start by acknowledging that it basically doesn’t exist in the overwhelming majority of the state,” Mr Malinauskas said.

“We’ve got a couple pockets that we’re particularly keeping an eye on at the tip of the Yorke Peninsula and Kangaroo Island.

“For a number of weeks now we’ve been facilitating additional testing there.”

Mr Malinauskas said there was a chance the algal bloom “comes back”.

“We’re monitoring it because it could potentially move and move westward,” he said.

“We just need to keep an eye on it.

“I do think it’s important we don’t unnecessarily incite fear.”

The bloom, which locals said left some areas resembling a “marine Chernobyl” – in reference to the 1980s nuclear disaster – had also been reported along the peninsula’s east coast, in St Vincent Gulf waters around Edithburgh, Stansbury and Port Julia and as high as Ardrossan and Clinton.

A row erupted last week after scathing residents, the local MP and opposition criticised the state government for having been “silent and missing” over the past fortnight.

Sources also alleged hesitation within parts of the public service to properly test or provide information because it was “politically challenging” just weeks from the election.

Ministers rejected any criticism of avoiding the crisis, pointing out at least \$150m worth of taxpayer grants, vouchers and cashbacks had been issued to support small businesses including more than \$2 million in travel discounts.