

20 August 2025
Our ref: 6882530

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications
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CC Deputy Premier Susan Close

Dear Committee Secretary

Senate inquiry into algal blooms in South Australia

I write in my capacity as the Mayor of the City of Onkaparinga and on behalf of our community, which is deeply saddened and concerned about the South Australian algal bloom.

Our community is worried about our health and the health of our pets, the short- and long-term impacts of the algal bloom on our lives and livelihoods and, most importantly, on the health and future of our highly valued marine ecosystem, here in our city and beyond our waters.

Introduction

The City of Onkaparinga is the largest metropolitan local government by population in South Australia. Our 180,860+ residents represent 10 per cent of the state's population.

Located on the southern urban fringe of the Greater Adelaide area, we are a coastal council with 31 kilometres of coastline. This coastline is treasured by the residents who call our city home and by the many businesses that are the lifeblood of our thriving local economy.

Our coastline is a pillar of the enviable lifestyle upon which we pride ourselves and pivotal to our vibrant tourism sector. Our region attracts hundreds of thousands of visitors each year, providing benefit to both our local and state economies.

Along with other coastal councils in metropolitan South Australia, our coastline has been severely affected by the algal bloom, with a myriad of dead marine animals washing up on our beaches. Sadly, we know this represents just a small fraction of actual deaths.

We welcome this important and timely inquiry, the findings of which we hope will deliver meaningful and actionable recommendations to support our state and local communities through this devastating environmental disaster.

Discussion

We recognise state and federal government jurisdiction over marine waters and understand that council's role in responding to the algal bloom outbreak is primarily as information provider, advocate on behalf of our community, facilitator and provider of clean-up support.

As the level of government closest to the community, the City of Onkaparinga Council resolved to hold a community information session on 7 August 2025, at which community members could hear from, and ask questions of, experts and state government representatives.

What our community told us

Our community has been directly affected by, and is deeply saddened and worried about, the algal bloom. Of greatest concern is its impact on human health, the health of our pets and, most importantly, our highly valued marine ecosystem. Our local marine ecosystem includes natural and artificial reefs which are breeding grounds and havens for a multitude of marine species, many of which are endemic to our area and occur nowhere else.

Council has also met with local businesses that have expressed significant concern about the impact of the algal bloom on their livelihoods, particularly as we move into the summer season. They have also flagged the potential long-term impacts on their businesses should the bloom not abate as quickly as is currently hoped.

Our community and businesses are ready and willing to act but are unsure as to what action they can take, given the emerging and ongoing nature of the situation, current limited scientific knowledge about the algal bloom, and advice at this time that there is no known way to kill or treat the algal bloom directly.

Impacts on council and local businesses

The direct and indirect impacts of the algal bloom to council and local businesses are many and varied, and likely to evolve over time.

Current impacts on council include:

- expectations for beach-cleans to remove affected marine life
- increased demand for council to facilitate access to information about the algal bloom and about support measures available
- a general desire by the community for council (and other levels of government) to 'take action', and
- concerns that our programs to support summer activations and events will be impacted by the continuation of the bloom into summer months (and potentially beyond), with visitor numbers and spend falling accordingly.

We confirm that the algal bloom has already had a noticeable economic impact on local businesses, particularly across the fishing tackle, boating, and seafood sectors. Early reports indicate that sales in the recreational fishing and boating industries are down by approximately 40 per cent, with many operators citing poor or no-catch rates and a sharp decline in customer activity.

Compounding this, local seafood retailers and restaurants are reporting difficulty in selling South Australian seafood, even that sourced from unaffected regions, due to shifting consumer perceptions. Some diners are actively requesting non-South Australian seafood, creating added strain on local supply chains and reducing demand for premium local produce.

While the current business impacts are still relatively localised, the risk to the broader regional economy is significant should the bloom persist into the summer season and beyond. Tourism, a major economic driver for the City of Onkaparinga, stands to suffer dramatically, with potential declines in coastal visitation, seaside activations, and accommodation bookings.

Based on preliminary modelling and industry feedback, a sustained algal bloom could result in a more than 35 per cent reduction in tourism activity across the region. This would have flow-on effects on local employment and place immense pressure on small businesses already operating on thin margins, increasing the likelihood of business closures and long-term economic disruption.

State and federal government action

The City of Onkaparinga welcomes state and federal announcements in response to the algal bloom including:

- the establishment of a Harmful Algal Bloom (HAB) Taskforce
- a \$28 million joint state-federal support package covering science, industry, community, and environment response measures, including creation of 15 new oyster reefs as part of long-term ecosystem recovery
- the launch of a dedicated website to centralise public information and provide updates, and information booklet
- regular water quality sampling and an expanded coastal monitoring network providing more real-time data
- increased public communication, including community forms, media briefings, and updated health advice
- support and funding opportunities for impacted businesses, councils and community organisation, including mental health assistance and grants, and
- coordination of on ground clean-up processes with local government.

While we commend these initiatives, we suggest more is needed to assist residents and businesses to weather the impacts of the algal bloom and to support their desire to make a difference. We note that funding for citizen science programs, additional beach clean-ups, seagrass restoration programs and artificial shellfish reefs have all been suggested. These are measures council is keen to see quickly implemented.

Depending on the duration of this algal bloom, we suggest additional state and/or federal government support may also be required for businesses at risk of closure in the event of future beach closures and other impacts of the algal bloom.

To further support businesses affected by the SA algal bloom, we suggest there is opportunity for state and federal governments to consider a suite of targeted assistance measures such as those deployed during the COVID-19 pandemic. These could include further emergency small business grants to offset immediate revenue losses, as well as the deferral of tax obligations such as BAS and PAYG payments to ease short-term cash flow pressures.

We suggest that dedicated marketing campaigns should also be considered to rebuild consumer confidence in South Australian coastal tourism. A tourism voucher system similar to that deployed during the COVID-19 pandemic could also prove useful.

Council response

Local councils, including the City of Onkaparinga, have played a key support role in the governmental response to the algal bloom. In addition to hosting the community information session on 7 August 2025, we are actively:

- advocating for long-term, nature-based solutions in line with our Coastal Adaptation Plan, including investment in blue carbon projects, ongoing scientific monitoring, and strategies that enhance the resilience of our coastal ecosystems
- sharing up-to-date public health advice from relevant state agencies, including on signage at beach entrances to alert residents and visitors to potential health risks, particularly for dogs and other pets, and via social media and a dedicated webpage
- liaising directly with impacted local businesses to understand concerns and advocate for support
- working with partners, including the Adelaide Coastal Councils Network (ACCN), South Australian Coastal Councils Alliance (SACCA) and the Harmful Algal Bloom Taskforce via the Harmful Algal Bloom Reference Group (HABRG)
- providing beach cleaning assistance during mass kill events, and
- providing opportunities for community involvement, including promotion of iNaturalist, Seeds for Snapper, Sustainable Onkaparinga, CoastSnap, the new \$3 million Community Fund announced by state and federal governments, and the development of Citizen Science Corners in our libraries.

Council remains committed to supporting clean-up efforts, and our local residents and businesses. We will continue to connect them with reliable information, funding opportunities and pathways for action as and when we receive this information.

The long view

Council supports the Local Government Association of South Australia's call for a national coordinated response to the Algal Bloom as outlined in its submission to your inquiry, with short-, medium- and long-term actions to support coastal communities, and the wider South Australian community, now and into the future.

Council notes advice from experts that the South Australian algal bloom is the result of multiple climate-related factors, including a prolonged marine heatwave. We are hearing that climate change is likely to increase the incidence of marine heatwaves and, therefore, outbreaks of such algal blooms. Committing federal funding to establish comprehensive, long-term monitoring and baseline data collection for the Great Southern Reef will assist with rehabilitation and future responses.

Urgently addressing the impacts of climate change through emissions reduction is, therefore, of critical importance. We consider it imperative that state and federal governments show strong leadership in urgently transitioning to renewable energy and prioritising the protection and restoration of our unique, essential and irreplaceable ecosystems and biodiversity.

The current Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) for 2030, under the Paris Agreement, and enshrined in the Climate Change Act, of 43 per cent emissions reduction, must be met and another strong emission reduction commitment made for the new NDC for 2035, along with significant funding allocated to actions to achieve the above and our national Net Zero Emissions by 2050 commitment.

Council believes that the South Australian agal bloom is another dire signal of the pressing need to support research into the development of innovative technological nature-based solutions. While we acknowledge that prevention is always preferable to reactive emergency responses, it is clear that climate impacts are already causing outcomes that require swift and effective interventions. I call on the Government to elevate the HAB response, recovery, and long-term habitat resilience to a declared national priority.

We also highlight that local government is uniquely placed to respond to climate impacts on infrastructure, both built and natural, yet remain perpetually underfunded to do so. While we are grateful for the state and federal government funding that we receive, we support the Australian Local Government Association's ongoing advocacy which highlights the significant missed opportunities that local government funding gaps represent, including the recent [Adapting Together: Local Government Leadership in a Changing Climate](#) Report.

This report is especially concerning given the high risk rating reported in the recent 7th Edition JLT Public Sector Risk Report 2025 where for the Metropolitan local government category nationally, they found the top three risks to be: (1) Financial Stability, (2) Cyber Security, and (3) Climate Change, with climate change also listed as a key factor affecting risks ranked (4) Assets & Infrastructure and (8) Disasters.

The City of Onkaparinga values our relationships with our state and federal counterparts, and we look forward to continuing our ongoing collaboration on this and other issues of importance.

I thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this important inquiry, and to advocate on behalf of our community.

Yours sincerely

Maira Were AM
Mayor