

22 August 2025

Attention: Committee Secretary  
Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications

## SUBMISSION

# Parliamentary Inquiry into the Algal Bloom in South Australia

## 1. Seafood Industry South Australia

1.1 Seafood Industry South Australia is the peak body representing all wild catch, aquaculture and post-harvest elements of the South Australian seafood industry across every species.

1.2 Our members are:

- Central Zone Abalone Fishery
- Southern Zone Abalone Management Inc
- Abalone Industry Association of SA Inc
- SA Blue Crab Pot Fishers Associations
- Marine Fishers Association
- South Australian Professional Fishers Association
- Southern Fisherman's Association
- St Vincent Gulf Prawn Boat Owner's Association
- Spencer Gulf and West Coast Prawn Association Inc
- South Australian Northern Zone Rock Lobster Fishermen's Association
- South Eastern Professional Fisherman's Associations
- SA Sardine Industry Association
- Vongole Fishers Association
- South Australian Mussel Growers Association

- South Australian Oyster Growers Association
  - Australian Marine Bioproducts Pty Ltd
  - Yumbah Aquaculture Ltd
  - Australian Southern Bluefin Tuna Industry Association
  - Charter Boat Fishery Association
- 1.3 Across our members, we represent 1500 post harvest, aquaculture and wild catch fishery licences in South Australia.
- 1.4 Established with funding from the Government of South Australia in 2023 to support the implementation of the Government's Seafood Growth Strategy, our role is to unite these diverse sectors under one trusted, independent voice that can identify shared challenges, advocate effectively to state, local and federal governments, and deliver solutions that protect and advance the industry's future.
- 1.5 Our vision is for a united and thriving seafood sector in South Australia — one that is valued by both government and the community.
- 1.6 Our purpose is to be a trusted partner and uniting voice, advocating to advance the seafood industry and ensure its ongoing strength, sustainability, and reputation.
- 1.7 Our work is guided by clear strategic priorities:
- Build resilience – helping members adapt to environmental, market, and regulatory changes while safeguarding long-term viability.
  - Promote SA's seafood industry – championing our premium, sustainable products locally, nationally, and internationally.
  - Increase unity and harmony across the sector – fostering collaboration, understanding, and shared purpose among diverse industry participants.
  - Advocate for shared issues – representing the industry's collective voice in policy, regulation, and public debate.
  - Improve security of access and investment – ensuring sustainable resource management and a stable operating environment for growth.
- 1.8 We have been advocating for the interests of members and the industry throughout the current algal bloom in South Australia, including meeting and sharing information with our members, advocating to government, and connecting members to the government supports and response activity.
- 1.9 Seafood Industry SA has two representatives on the Government of South Australia's *Algal Bloom Reference Group* and has been a key contact point for government.
- 1.10 We have refocused our organisational workplan and resources toward responding to the bloom given its catastrophic potential impacts on our sector.

## **2. The current algal bloom in South Australia**

- 2.1 The algal bloom currently impacting South Australia represents a crisis of unprecedented scale for the seafood industry.
- 2.2 This event is not only widespread - affecting multiple key regions - but also unpredictable in its duration, severity, and immediate and long-term consequences that may last across several seasons.
- 2.3 The algal bloom creates a risk of long-term damage to the state's seafood economy, the viability of marine-based industries, and the communities they sustain.
- 2.4 This large-scale impact is affecting income generating capacity, employment, and the long-term viability of the sector.
- 2.5 South Australia's fisheries and aquaculture contribute an estimated \$788 m in gross state product (GSP) and directly employs more than 6,250 South Australians. In scale, the Port Lincoln seafood industry is at an employment scale larger than the Whyalla Steelworks – and the algal bloom extends beyond Port Lincoln.
- 2.6 The unknown duration of this event may severely impact not only current production but retention of operators, workforce and biomass.

### **2.7 Current impacts**

- 2.8 As of writing in late August 2025, there are serious, immediate impacts being endured by our industry.
- 2.9 Some fisheries and locations are closed to commercial activity: Gulf St Vincent, Kangaroo Island, Lakes and Coorong and Spencer Gulf (inclusive of Proper Bay Port Lincoln).
- 2.10 Throughout the Gulf St Vincent, Kangaroo Island and other affected areas, members are reporting significant reduction in catch. For example, in the Gulf St Vincent, in July less than 30kg of calamari has been caught. The typical average is 6-7 tonnes. Garfish and King George Whiting catches in the same gulf are similarly affected.
- 2.11 These present very significant impacts to the financial status and viability for some commercial fishing operators, who have entirely or substantially lost income generating capacity for the last several months.
- 2.12 Moreover, because of the seasonality of catch for some licence holders, some have missed or are at risk of missing their 'peak' season, during which they earn the bulk of their annual income, creating uncertainty about future costs (such as licence fees) even after the bloom has resolved.
- 2.13 In the post-harvest sector, there has been a decline in demand for seafood, with consumers expressing concern at point of sale and online about the safety of South Australian seafood. This is presenting a challenge for the financial stability of post-harvest operators, but also the fall in demand means even those commercial fishery licence

holders who can catch are subject to falling prices, or decreased demand. If post-harvest sector businesses close, there will be no quick resumption of seafood processors in the state. It is a specific skill base, often taking years to train and educate staff on the intricacies of fish processing. Commercial fisheries rely on the post-harvest sector to take food to market.

- 2.14 There is a significant impact on regional areas that rely on both tourism and the seafood industry as their key economic drivers. Concerns about safety of the marine environment for humans and animals, combined with low catch and/or closed fisheries, means that the income that flows into these communities from tourism and fishing alike is decreased, with limited opportunities for alternative economic growth drivers.

### **2.15 Potential future impacts**

- 2.16 Without being able to forecast the duration of the algal bloom, and until suitable monitoring on impacts on each individual biomass becomes available, the potential future impacts of the algal bloom are unknown and may fundamentally challenge the seafood industry for many seasons after it is resolved.

### **2.17 Spread to currently unaffected areas**

- 2.18 Currently, members are deeply concerned about the potential for the bloom to spread further across the Eyre Peninsula, and particularly to fisheries accessed by fleets from Australia's seafood capital of Port Lincoln. There is some emerging evidence of algal blooms near Arno Bay, on the western side of the Spencer Gulf, resulting in fish kills both in the ocean and in aquaculture facilities. There are raised brevetoxin levels in Cowell where Oyster Farms have been closed.
- 2.19 Port Lincoln is the home of Australia's largest Southern Bluefin Tuna Fishery, employing up to 1000 people alone. It is estimated that the seafood industry employs 2500+ individuals directly in Port Lincoln and at least another 1500 people employed in allied industries that support the industry such as freight.
- 2.20 The Spencer Gulf is home to a significant proportion of South Australia's aquaculture leases. While some commercial fishing has been able to relocate to avoid areas affected by the algal bloom, this is much more difficult for static and semi-static operations such as oyster leases and aquaculture cages.
- 2.21 Port Lincoln is home to a significant sardine fishery, which in addition to supplying consumer product, supplies 95% of the feed to the Southern Blue Fin Tuna ranching operations. Finding alternative bait (food sources) for Tuna that are in grow out pens off the coast of Port Lincoln would be near impossible in the required timeframes, and without alternatives, sufficient storage this would halt production of the grow out of Southern Bluefin Tuna.

### **2.22 Duration**

- 2.23 The unknown duration of the algal bloom creates the greatest uncertainty and level of concern for the seafood industry.

- 2.24 Critically important is the ability to sustain and retain our skilled workforce in circumstances where activity has stopped or is significantly reduced. Some licence holders have already laid off staff, with others expected to do so if the algal bloom lasts much longer.
- 2.25 This presents a significant difficulty in our ability to recover once the algal bloom has resolved, with skilled staff lost to the industry, the region and even the state.
- 2.26 We are extremely concerned about the potential for the duration of the algal bloom to impact demand and access in domestic and key overseas export markets. Poorly referenced or positioned narratives, and uninformed media or political narrative create unnecessary consumer concern, which then creates a downturn in current and ongoing demand. The industry cannot afford unnecessary concern or risks in export markets questioning the safety of South Australian seafood, particularly in sectors like lobster who have only recently regained market access, or in mature markets like Southern Blue Fin Tuna where there is no fish health or consumer risk. Now is a time for mature and supportive messaging that supports the industry, not undermines its reputation.
- 2.27 Finally, the impacts on the biomass of each of the species available for commercial fishing is as yet unknown, and may not ever be known. It is possible that the fish kills associated with the algal bloom may reduce stocks for years to come, with limited existing information about recruitment in the current year and following years. The entire ecosystem has been changed by the presence of these algal blooms and we will not know how this impacts sea life and the benthic habitat into the future.
- 2.28 This means there is a risk that even after the algal bloom has resolved, there is insufficient stock to support the current level of activity in various fisheries, which may require a reduction in quota, or closure of certain fisheries to allow stocks to regenerate.
- 2.29 Accordingly, we have identified some key areas for government action to support response and recovery in the context of a long duration event, further detailed in sections 4 and 5 below.

### **3. Government response to current impacts**

#### **3.1 SA Government**

- 3.2 SISA acknowledge that there were challenges in the initial response to the algal bloom. Like prior fish kill events and other limited algal blooms, relevant scientific information suggested the bloom may dissipate with colder temperatures and winter storm events. The uncertainty about whether the bloom would endure and spread contributed to the difficulty in standing up a response to this issue.
- 3.3 The lack of existing frameworks and standard operating models for response to a marine disaster of this size, scale and impact meant that unlike other disasters where there are clear triggers for emergency response activities, the initial response to this emergency

was characterised by uncertainty about when, where and what actions were required, and who was responsible for undertaking them.

- 3.4 While we acknowledge that the government cannot address or mitigate the algal bloom itself, like a bushfire or other natural disaster, there is a role for governments of all levels in providing coordination, information, surveillance and monitoring, response and recovery.
- 3.5 The industry support response announced by the Government of South Australia on 22 July 2025 has been responsive to industry demands, changing conditions and industry feedback.
- 3.6 The South Australian Seafood Industry Association called for many response activities which have subsequently been supported by the South Australian government.
- 3.7 These include:
- Improved testing and monitoring, best serviced by bolstering the IMOS network. This allows better information to plan and manage fishing activity and provides better advance information about likelihood of marine disasters.
  - Local brevetoxin testing, to overcome delays in taking product to market. Testing is currently only available in New Zealand
  - Funding of \$160,000 for the Stay Afloat program to provide contextualised mental health supports for affected operators.
  - Industry financial assistance, including responsiveness to initial criteria to ensure that all affected licence holders can access temporary financial support to manage immediate financial demands.
  - Following the feedback from our post-harvest sector members about the community concerns about the safety of seafood consumption and the attendant drop in demand, we were pleased with the significant Government of South Australia commitment to a \$700,000 campaign that provides improved public information and promotes South Australian seafood domestically.
- 3.8 Following feedback through our association on the challenges some operators were having accessing financial assistance, we are pleased with the immediate responsiveness of the Government of South Australia, to improve the accessibility of financial assistance by streamlining the application process and adjusting the criteria to reflect the seasonality of some species.
- 3.9 We appreciate the support to industry associations including ours to resource more timely and responsive engagement with members and coordinate cross-sectoral response efforts.
- 3.10 We acknowledge and appreciate the Government of South Australia standing up required coordination and resourcing through a team at the Department of the Premier and Cabinet that is providing the cross-government coordination and emergency operational

environment necessary to continuing to provide accurate timely information and responsiveness to industry conditions.

### **3.11 Australian Government**

- 3.12 We acknowledge and appreciate the initial financial contribution of \$14 million from the Australian Government to the Government of South Australia's response to the impacts of the algal bloom.
- 3.13 It is unfortunate that the initial Australian Government response seemed to indicate they would only be actively involved in any disaster response if the event were in Commonwealth waters. This is of course not the case for other types of disaster, such as flood and bushfire, where the Australian Government plays a clear role alongside state and territory governments in response and recovery, irrespective of the titleholder of the land.
- 3.14 There are several specific areas of Commonwealth responsibility where we consider there is an opportunity for further and better support to the seafood industry both in South Australia, and in future marine disasters or ecological events wherever they may occur.
- 3.15 The first is the opportunity to retain skilled workers and keep them connected to their industry, employer and region through a small, targeted JobKeeper-style program for the seafood industry. Such an approach preserves jobs and business relationships, allowing quick restart and recovery when crises resolve. It will retain difficult to replace skilled workers in the regions that will need them when the bloom resolves. It protects income and reduces layoffs, cushioning the economic impact, which is potentially very real in small regional areas who rely on the seafood industry as their key economic driver.
- 3.16 The second is the opportunity to address the obvious gap in Australia's emergency and disaster management framework to contemplate ecological events and disasters in Australia's marine environment.
- 3.17 Finally, the longer this event lasts the more significant the long-term impacts on the industry will be, and the more challenging recovery will become. It is likely that further Commonwealth investment will be required in a long-term response and recovery plan for this event, that will support the continuation of a sustainable seafood industry in South Australia.

## **4. Long term response and recovery**

- 4.1 The intensity of the response and recovery effort the South Australian seafood industry will need will require better understanding of the full impacts of the current algal bloom, but we anticipate it may require intervention and resourcing from both Australian and state governments on:
- Sustaining and driving consumer demand: Leveraging the government campaign to address the current reduction in consumer demand arising from concerns about the safety of seafood in an algal bloom, we may complement with an associated digital campaign to drive a growth in long-term demand.

- Mitigation: Working with scientists and researchers on opportunities to mitigate impacts of any future algal bloom or marine disaster where possible.
- Product diversification: Supporting innovation in processing including increasing value-added products, alternative and underutilised species.
- Capacity building: Providing improved industry training on handling, processing, and market maximisation.
- Market access: Supporting re-entry into any lost export markets, including through advocacy, international promotions, trade shows or networks.
- Fisheries management: work alongside industry, government and conservationists to ensure sustainable fish stocks into the future.

## 5. Future events

- 5.1 While it is too late for the current South Australian algal bloom, it is imperative that the Australian government and parliament cement the legislative framework, standardised emergency thresholds and response plans for marine disasters. The reality of a changing climate is that we can expect marine disasters, like other natural disasters, to become more regular and more severe. They may not always take the form of algal blooms, and may include biosecurity threats, such as viruses, hypoxic events, marine heatwaves and events such as cyclones.
- 5.2 An essential part of coastal economies, and our sovereign capabilities in food production, the seafood industry provides jobs and food security for Australians. Since fisheries depend on the productivity of the environment, there are natural variations in the volume of seafood caught each year and in the revenue generated. However, the seafood industry is also subject to several factors that can cause sudden and unexpected losses, leading to serious economic impact for the industry and our communities. These factors include events such as biosecurity threats, harmful algal blooms, and other types of disasters, both natural and man-made.
- 5.3 A framework that contemplates the economic, social and environmental impacts of marine disasters and ecological events, and provides access to the Disaster Relief Funding Agreement, would avoid the uncertainty about responsibility and response options that characterised the early response to South Australia's algal bloom.
- 5.4 Additionally, there is opportunity for the federal government and state governments to play a more active role in creating the conditions for a thriving industry in the context of uncertain impacts from a changing climate. SISA has been an active funder and participant in the Seafood Industry Australia's forthcoming *Futures of Seafood* report, which will make recommendations to both state, territory and the Commonwealth government about key actions needed to secure the long term viability of Australian seafood and the rights of the seafood industry in the broader, increasingly competitive



marine estate. We encourage the Committee to engage with this report when it becomes available.

## 6. Further information

For further information or to appear before the Committee, please contact

- Ms Alison Lloyd-Wright, Chair, Seafood Industry South Australia,
- Mr Kyri Toumazos, Executive Officer, Seafood Industry South Australia,

Our website is [www.seafoodindustrysa.com.au](http://www.seafoodindustrysa.com.au)

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry.