

22 August 2025

Committee Secretary
Environment and Communications References Committee – Algal blooms in South Australia
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600
AUSTRALIA

Dear Committee Secretary

Re: Senate Enquiry – Algal Blooms in South Australia

The Australian Southern Bluefin Tuna Industry Association (ASBTIA) welcomes the opportunity to provide input into the Senate Inquiry on the causes, impacts, and management of algal blooms in South Australia. ASBTIA represents more than 80% of the Statutory Fishing Rights (quota) holders of Southern Bluefin Tuna in Australia. Our members represent a significant sector of the Australian seafood industry, with operations based primarily in the waters off Port Lincoln.

Whilst the current algal bloom has had minimal direct impact on our tuna ranching operations to date, we remain concerned about the potential short- and long-term consequences should the bloom persist or intensify.

Potential Impacts on the Southern Bluefin Tuna Industry

1. Water Quality and Environmental Conditions

Our ranching operations rely on high-quality, clean marine environments for the health and welfare of our fish. SBT ranching remains one of the few finfish aquaculture operations in the world that do not use antibiotics, artificial feed, flavour or colourings, and essentially maintain an 'organic' operation. As a result we typically experience mortality levels of less than 0.5% in our operations, a benchmark we are very proud of. Algal blooms, particularly if prolonged or toxic, can significantly alter water quality parameters including oxygen levels, pH, and the presence of harmful biotoxins. Any sustained degradation in water quality may affect fish behaviour, stress levels, and growth performance, with broader implications for animal health and welfare.

2. Impacts on Sardine Fisheries

The South Australian sardine fishery is integral to our operations as sardines form the primary feed source for farmed southern bluefin tuna. Algal blooms may impact sardine populations both

directly—through changes in habitat and water conditions—and indirectly, by influencing migratory or schooling behaviour. Any reduction in the availability or quality of feed fish would present serious operational and economic challenges for our sector.

3. Changes to Migration and Marine Ecosystems

Sustained or repeated blooms may cause ecosystem-level changes, potentially affecting the migratory behaviour and distribution of tuna and other marine species. This could disrupt well-established patterns in our farming cycle and planning, including fish capture, transfer, and grow-out schedules.

Reputational and Market Impacts

Of particular concern to the ASBTIA is the reputational damage arising from the public and media discourse surrounding algal blooms. While we understand the importance of transparency and public health messaging, the use of terms such as “catastrophic” or “disaster” in media coverage—without appropriate scientific context or differentiation between sectors—risks undermining consumer confidence in South Australian seafood products, both domestically and internationally.

The Southern Bluefin Tuna industry operates under stringent food safety, biosecurity, and environmental management standards, with the Australian SBT purse seine fishery being the first SBT fishery in the world to achieve the Marine Stewardship Council standard in 2025. No health or safety risks have been identified in our product as a result of the current bloom. However, the amplification of alarmist language can have long-lasting consequences for brand trust, export relationships, and overall market confidence—effects that may persist long after the environmental event has resolved.

Recommendations

ASBTIA respectfully makes the following recommendations, many of which have been fully or partially covered in current government and industry responses:

- 1. Improved Monitoring and Forecasting:**
Investment in real-time and predictive monitoring tools for algal blooms to assist in early detection and risk mitigation.
- 2. Cross-Sector Communication:**
Development of a coordinated response protocol involving industry, government, and scientific bodies to ensure accurate, timely, and sector-specific information is shared with the public.
- 3. Media Engagement Strategy:**
Establishment of a government-led communication framework to support responsible media reporting, including guidance for describing environmental events in a manner that avoids undue market alarm.

4. Research into Ecosystem Impacts:

Further scientific investigation into the potential long-term ecological consequences of recurrent algal blooms, particularly in relation to pelagic species such as sardines and tuna.

Conclusion

While the Southern Bluefin Tuna industry has not experienced significant disruption to date, the ASBTIA remains vigilant and concerned about the possible escalation of impacts should blooms become more frequent, severe, or persistent. We strongly support a collaborative, science-led, and proportionate response to this issue, balancing environmental protection with the sustainability and reputation of South Australia's vital seafood industries.

Finally, it is important that any response finds a balance between 'emergency response' investment into ideas like bespoke infrastructure that may never be utilised, versus short to medium term business support that ensures businesses and workforce are available to recommence operations once the bloom subsides.

We thank the Senate Committee for considering this submission and would welcome any opportunity to provide further information or to appear before the Committee if required.

Sincerely

Daniel Casement
Chief Executive Officer
Australian Southern Bluefin Tuna Industry Association