



# Submission to the Senate Inquiry into Algal Blooms in South Australia

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## About the Eyre Peninsula Local Government Association

The Eyre Peninsula Local Government Association (EPLGA) is a long-standing regional subsidiary under the *South Australian Local Government Act 1999*, which was established in 1938. It provides services to and advocates on behalf of its 11 member councils, which are:

- City of Port Lincoln
- City of Whyalla
- District Council of Ceduna
- District Council of Cleve
- District Council of Elliston
- District Council of Franklin Harbour
- District Council of Kimba
- District Council of Streaky Bay
- District Council of Tumby Bay
- Lower Eyre Council
- Wudinna District Council

## About the Eyre Peninsula Local Government Association

Collectively, the Eyre Peninsula's 11 councils represent communities spread across a vast area. The region has 50% of South Australia's coastline and 25% of its total land area and is home to 58,900 residents.

The Eyre Peninsula is also one of South Australia's most productive regions, generating more than \$4 billion in gross regional product annually. The region is highly export oriented and benefits from established agriculture, commercial fishing and aquaculture industries.

It produces more than 80% of South Australia's seafood, including 97% of its oysters and 92% of its mussels.

Tourism is also a significant industry with the region recording 551,000 visitor day trips per year, which directly supports 2,000 jobs.

## Background

Since March 2025, a severe harmful algal bloom—driven by *Karenia mikimotoi*—has devastated much of South Australia’s coastline.

This bloom turned coastal waters discoloured and foamy and has caused the death of thousands of fish and shellfish, with more than 450 different species washed up on the South Australian coastline.

While algal blooms are naturally occurring, the scale and duration of this event are without precedent in living memory and have likely been exacerbated by a marine heatwave with sea temperatures 2.5°C above average.

## Immediate impact on the Eyre Peninsula

EPLGA notes that LGA South Australia, the South Australian Coastal Councils Alliance, and Adelaide Coastal Councils Network have provided a joint submission to the inquiry which details the environmental, economic and social impacts of the algal bloom across the state’s coastal communities. The EPLGA supports this joint submission and its recommendations.

This submission deals specifically with the impacts on the Eyre Peninsula’s councils and communities.

It is important to note that as of 22 August 2025, most of the Eyre Peninsula’s 2,000km of coastline has not been exposed to the algal bloom.

However, several areas have been acutely affected with impacts including disrupted commercial and recreational fishing activities, closures to aquaculture operations including oyster and mussel farming, incorrectly diminished public confidence in local seafood products, increased monitoring and testing costs on industry and government, and concerns regarding the long-term sustainability of the region’s marine ecosystems.

The bloom has had a significant impact on the local seafood industry, which is a key employer and contributor to the region’s economy.

On the Eyre Peninsula, where fishing fleets target species like sardines, abalone, and scale-fish, reduced catches translate directly to lost income. The sudden abundance of dead fish and marine life has also led to negative public perceptions of seafood safety, compounding the problem. Seafood suppliers have seen demand fall as consumers grew wary of buying fish from South Australian waters.

On 9 July, the South Australian Shellfish Quality Assurance Program closed marine harvesting areas in Port Lincoln at Boston Bay, Bickers Island, Lower Eyre and Proper Bay after it detected brevetoxins in the water. Although some sites later reopened following clear tests, the loss of production time and uncertainty impacted on growers.

In the District Council of Franklin Harbour, the oyster industry has been placed under precautionary closure by the State Government since 30 July. This is a key industry for the area, and the shutdown has had a material impact on the local economy.

In the weeks since these closures and the associated publicity, the town of Cowell – which is a popular fishing destination – has experienced a downturn in tourism, with the caravan park mostly empty.

This is consistent with an overall decline in tourism across the Eyre Peninsula and other coastal areas across South Australia in recent months.

A state-wide survey by the Tourism Industry Council SA found about 40% of tourism and hospitality businesses affected by the bloom reported a downturn in trade, with an average loss of \$52,000 in the month of July. Notably, 14% of businesses lost over \$100,000 in that month.

The survey revealed widespread booking cancellations, even extending to future holidays. This indicates that media coverage of the bloom and public perceptions have deterred visitors well beyond the areas in which the bloom is active.

### **Long term impact on the Eyre Peninsula**

Councils are increasingly concerned about the long-term impacts of this bloom and the need for national action and investment to understand, mitigate, and manage the impacts of future blooms.

Beyond the economic shutdowns and ecological damage, the reputational harm—through negative perceptions of marine tourism and seafood—could outlast the environmental event itself.

The seafood and tourism industries are vital to the future prosperity of the Eyre Peninsula and the 58,000 Australians who live in the region.

Despite the fact that vast sections of the Eyre Peninsula remain physically untouched by the algal bloom, the public perception of its spread has had an impact across the region.

There is uncertainty around how long the current event will last – or whether there will be similar future events – and concern that lost consumer confidence and future visitation could continue to grow higher if not addressed.

This underscores the inquiry's focus on economic impacts and the need for strategies to assist affected industries and buffer such shocks in the future.

## **EPLGA response to support so far**

The EPLGA acknowledges and appreciates the support that has been provided to date by both the South Australian and federal governments.

This includes a joint State/Commonwealth \$28 million funding package, as well as an additional \$8.5 million announced by Prime Minister Albanese during his visit to South Australia on 20 August.

A key component of this funding is grants of up to \$10,000 for impacted small businesses, and tiered support for fisheries and aquaculture operators, up to \$100,000.

The EPLGA notes that under current arrangements, small businesses require a 30% decline in turnover to access the \$10,000 support, and fisheries/aquaculture operators face similar or steeper thresholds.

This could potentially exclude businesses that have experienced significant cumulative distress, reputational loss, or partial closures and therefore remain vulnerable, and the EPLGA recommends that discretion is applied in assessing funding applications.

The EPLGA is very concerned by the potential long-term impacts to the region's seafood and tourism industries, and so particularly welcomes the commitment to invest \$2 million in public information campaigns focused on rebuilding confidence and driving visitation to SA's coastal regions and marine based tourism businesses and promoting the seafood industry and benefits of recreational fishing.

## **Recommendations**

The EPLGA supports the five recommendations outlined in the joint LGA South Australia/South Australian Coastal Councils Association, being:

1. A national framework to recognise and manage large scale marine mortality events caused by harmful algal bloom events or severe marine heatwaves, including:

- funding for affected industries, and for councils to assist with environmental clean-up, restoration activities, and safe reopening of affected areas,
- nationally coordinated communication of accurate, science-based information to the public, and
- amending the National Emergency Declaration Act 2020 to enable such largescale and far-reaching algal bloom events to be declared a national emergency.

2. Development and delivery of a Community Wellbeing and Resilience Framework to support social and mental health outcomes in communities affected by harmful algal blooms and other large-scale marine mortality events.
3. Acceleration of Australia's decarbonisation efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and ocean warming.
4. Federal funding to establish comprehensive, long-term monitoring and baseline data collection for the Great Southern Reef.
5. Federal funding to enable councils to respond to, and recover from, climate related events including algal blooms and build the resilience of councils and communities to climate change generally.

In addition, noting the uncertainty about the length of the current algal bloom event as well as the likelihood of extended impacts on affected communities, the EPLGA recommends extending the \$2 million that has been committed for public information campaigns to support longer term campaign activities.