



An Australian Government Initiative



YORKE AND MID NORTH

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications
Canberra ACT 2600
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Members of the Standing Committee

Environment and Communications References Committee - Inquiry into Algal blooms in South Australia

RDA Yorke and Mid North appreciates the opportunity to make this submission to the Standing Committee on Environment and Communication's inquiry into the algal blooms currently impacting South Australia. The work of the Committee and the collective response(s) by governments are crucial to supporting regional communities through the current series of events and strengthening the ability of these communities to weather future challenges.

RDA Yorke and Mid North is an incorporated not-for-profit association funded by the three levels of government to work with stakeholders and communities to grow prosperity and enhance liveability in the Yorke and Mid North region of South Australia. This work with these local stakeholders yields a range of information, insights and understanding that will hopefully assist the Committee (and other policymakers) in its current work.

This submission addresses sections of the terms of references relating to the regional economy in the Yorke and Mid North:

The causes, frequency, scale and duration of recent algal blooms in South Australian marine and coastal environments, with particular reference to:

- b. ecological, economic, cultural and social impacts of algal bloom with particular reference to:*
 - i. tourism, commercial and recreational fishing industries*
 - ii. regional and coastal communities*

The Yorke Peninsula (comprising the local government areas of Barunga West, Copper Coast and Yorke Peninsula councils) has a combined population of more than 30,000 (ABS: 2024). Tourism and fishing represent two significant sectors in the local economy, creating more than \$191 million in economic output in 2023-24 and accounting for almost 11 per cent of the workforce (REMPAN: 2025). There are 470 tourism businesses registered with the Australian Tourism Database Warehouse, servicing 620,000 overnight visitors annually, of whom the largest share (58%) make use of the Yorke Peninsula's stunning coastlines by spending time at the beach as part of their holiday; fishing is the fifth most popular activity, with 33% of visitors partaking (SATC: 2025).

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However, the effect of tourism and the fishing industry on Yorke Peninsula goes far beyond economic figures. It represents character, culture, and lifestyle of the region. People choose to live and visit the Yorke Peninsula because of the identity of the region defined by recreational fishing and crabbing, the abundance of hospitality and retail opportunities that are sustained by tourism and the possibility of enjoying water sports and beach strolling.

The impact on bookings for caravan parks has been variable to date, staying at approximately the same level as last year with some exceptions, for instance Point Turton is experiencing a 12% decrease (Yorke Peninsula Council: 2025). As of mid-August 2025, caravan park managers are not yet reporting significant cancellations (attributed to the fact that many people holidaying in caravan parks on the Yorke Peninsula have set weeks where families and friends get together and the tradition of reuniting with family and friends outweighs the effect of the algal bloom).

Bush camps situated at 19 sites along the coast (and managed by Yorke Peninsula Council) have experienced a sharp decline in bookings, however. The occupancy report was down 60% on June 2025 compared June to 2024 - partly attributable to the algal bloom (that and a reduction in available bush camps from November 2024). The council has discounted most bush camp fees to \$10 a night instead of \$20 to encourage visitation (Yorke Peninsula Council: 2025).

Motels in Stansbury are reporting significant numbers of cancellations of forward bookings, and (unusually) no take up of casual vacancies, while fewer reports of falling occupancy rates have been received for locations further north and west.

Tourism operators that rely on group bookings such as school camps are experiencing sharp drops in bookings of 70% or more, as institutions such as schools or corporate events are risk adverse and will avoid booking any event that could be detrimental in any way to the participants.

The professional fishing industry and oyster growers have been profoundly affected in most areas, with a large number who have not caught a fish or sold oysters since April 2025. Their financial situation and mental health are precarious. Some businesses in the Gulf St Vincent have been forced to relocate and face considerable fees in addition to the loss of income, some businesses have received no income and rely on savings and loans from the bank.

Data collected through RDA Yorke and Mid North's Industry Outreach program shows local business sentiment has fallen sharply since the outbreak of the algal bloom. Results from businesses surveyed in the Yorke Peninsula for the period July 2024 to February 2025 (prior to the outbreak) showed net confidence of 17.8 points. Since the outbreak (March 2025), the average has fallen to -9.4 points.

The fall in business sentiment is significant and well-founded, but many local operators believe media coverage is having a negative impact on consumer sentiment as well. The efforts from the Government of South Australia, local governments and certain sectors of the media to promote a positive image are being recognised but the message is not always getting through according to local operators. One fish retailer stated that she was often asked where the fish was caught and fish caught in South Australia was not purchased, regardless of the frequent and clear message that fish sold in shops is suitable to eat.

Many operators have expressed concerns about the summer season, and think that while people are at present ready to support the Yorke Peninsula once the warm weather begins, people who want to swim, fish and surf may choose another destination for their annual holiday.

According to Rural Business Support officers, deterioration in the mental health of the residents and business operators is a key concern. One fishing operator stated “It is not about the money, it is the devastation and destruction of a beautiful environment I have spent my life working in and enjoying and generations before me. Stansbury feels like Ground Zero”.

e. the current support and recovery arrangements for impacted industries and communities, including:

i. financial support for fishing, tourism and other impacted businesses,

ii. community resilience services

The harmful algal bloom crisis is happening at the same time than the severe drought still experienced by farmers in the Yorke Peninsula. Support for impacted communities has been offered such as On-Farm Drought Infrastructure Grants, Health and Wellbeing Support, Connecting Communities Events Program, Family and Business Mentors and Rural Financial Counsellors and this support is available to algal bloom affected primary producers.

In addition affected businesses have been better informed of the range of assistance available through the Office of Small and Family Business information line, the financial and application counselling offered by the Rural Business Support and the assistance available from Regional Development Australia and local government.

The cumulative impact of these natural events cannot be understated. A number of agencies are assisting primary producers and tourism operators navigating the paperwork as well as providing mental health support. This help and support will be needed on an ongoing basis, with a number of applicants for the *Algal Bloom Support Package* reporting difficulties in completing forms, while others were confused by the guidelines.

The Office for Small and Family Business have listened to the concerns and addressed them by extending the period of application and extending the three month window period for comparison of income from last year, taking into account most of the tourism income in the Yorke Peninsula happens in the warmer months. These changes have been positively received by the respondents.

Sustained, consistent and positive messaging - across channels accessed by key target demographics for the Yorke Peninsula – is required to reinforce messages that the Yorke Peninsula (and other coastal areas) remain enjoyable, safe and warranting time spent.

Media, visitors and residents must be shown the breadth and depth of products, attractions and opportunities to be experienced in these communities, and support provided to those operators (and communities) to strengthen their offerings and messaging to enable this.

Support packages funded by Federal and State Governments are providing support to impacted businesses, with recent changes to eligibility and administration requirements improving the accessibility of these supports. This flexibility will continue to be needed going forwards, as conditions and circumstances continue to evolve over the coming months. This is evident in the prawn and crab fisheries based in Wallaroo and Port Broughton, which have not yet been impacted to the same extent as marine scale fishers, but may as fishing seasons move into their (traditional) peak periods.

The Board appreciates the current circumstances are without precedent, requiring a dynamic response involving a broad range of stakeholders. The Board is committed to working with Federal, State and local governments, and local businesses and communities to address these challenges for the benefit of the local community.

To this end, the Board is available to discuss current conditions, required policy responses and this submission further to support the work of the Committee. Please contact Daniel Willson, CEO of RDA Yorke and Mid North at with any questions or to arrange further discussions.

Kind regards,

Bill Vandeppeer

Chair

RDA Yorke and Mid North