

To the South Australian Marine and Coastal Algal Bloom Senate Inquiry, 9th August 2025

My name is Bartholomew Butson, and I am a third-generation inshore marine scale fisherman from Port Wakefield, South Australia. Port Wakefield is about 100km north of Adelaide, near the top of Gulf St Vincent. I own a small family fishing business. My son and I work on my fishing boat in the waters of Upper Gulf St. Vincent, just as my grandfather and father have before me. To date, and as far back as the mid-1960s, our family has made a modest living from fishing these waters, but as of now, I am very uncertain as to whether we will be able to continue because of this destructive algal bloom crisis. It is a very harrowing experience for me, just as it is for many other fishing families in South Australia.

From early this year, I have witnessed the algae spread from the Fleurieu Peninsula to the top of Gulf St Vincent like a spreading wall of destruction, killing the sea life as it spreads, causing a blanket of economic and emotional trauma in its wake.

In my submission, I will outline some of the issues of main concern from my perspective as a small-scale fisherman. I will focus on my area of expertise, but of course, I realise that the most important and overarching issue must be the recovery and health of our precious marine and coastal ecosystems, because, without that, the fishers have nothing.

- **Commercial fishing viability – there are fewer fish available because the algae have killed many of them.**
- **Fishers are suffering economically and emotionally**
- **The Federal and state governments are struggling to successfully manage this disaster**
- **Apparent lack of ecological monitoring and understanding of algal bloom prevention and management.**
- **Governments' commitment to sufficient resources for the immediate and long-term management of this disaster.**

Commercial fishing viability

Many of South Australia's Marine Scale fishers are struggling to catch enough, or in some cases, any fish in the algae-affected areas, and I am uncertain of how long this will continue. The level of loss of fish seems to vary depending on the location, and I would assume the level of algae concentration. I honestly believe that I am fairing better than many of my colleagues because of where I fish the algae has only just recently taken over and I was catching ok for a while but now I am catching less by the day and it feels like the end of catching is very close for me now. I know of some fishers who have not caught enough fish to make a pay for three or four months and counting.

Without going into specific details of all fish loss because it exceeds my level of knowledge, I will highlight two commercially invaluable species for my fishing business and many of my colleagues. The marine scale commercial fishery is not seeing or catching any southern calamari in the whole of Gulf St Vincent. It is usual for catches of up to ten tonnes per month for our fishery, but at present, there are none; it seems like the entire species never existed and has become extinct, It is my strongest hope that they have moved to somewhere safe and that they will return in time, but for

now, there are no squid; only 24kg have been recorded to this date as being caught in the official records from July 1st, 2025 (PIRSA QBS Report, 2025). There are almost no garfish left now. I have seen many washed up dead, I have seen them dying out in the gulf and I am not catching any now, when usually I would be catching two to three hundred kilograms per trip at this time of the year. I have mentioned commercially important fish species because they are important to myself and other fishers but please do not take this commentary as if I do not see, think or care about all of the other species of marine life that I see either dead or dying daily, it is just terrible for me to see the devastation and loss of the sharks, rays, dolphins, cuttlefish, and many others; it is just so very depressing and such a loss.

Fishers are suffering economically and emotionally

The marine scale fishers in my state who are affected by the disaster cannot survive economically without fish to catch and sell. The emotional distraught that the fishers are suffering from is twofold; it's economic, they are struggling to pay their bills now, and it is also the trauma of seeing their beloved sea sick and the dying sea life that we witness every day that we go fishing, and from a personal perspective, it's just heartbreaking. A fisher said to me recently that it makes him feel physically sick.

Federal and state governments are struggling to successfully manage this disaster

The federal and state government responses from my practical point of view have been a bit slow and have missed the mark in terms of the value and apportionment of resources. To date, the fishers are finding the criteria to access the support grants very restrictive and almost impossible to qualify for the funding resources. That said, I am grateful for the assistance and goodwill so far from the federal and state governments, and I am hopeful and looking forward to further assistance for the fishing industry during the period of the crisis. The support has also been crucial in terms of its demonstration of goodwill and consideration, and has helped me personally with my confidence and motivation to work through this disaster. It's my personal opinion that without the assistance, there would be many small family businesses facing very, very difficult times financially and emotionally.

Apparent lack of ecological monitoring and understanding of algal bloom prevention and management.

This marine disaster has caught our governments and their departments unprepared to deal with the level of devastation very well and it would be wise to bolster our scientific community with greater resources and facilities with the aim of better forecasting and management of our marine environment, so we can avoid or cope with these algal events with better success in the future.

Governments' commitment to sufficient resources for the immediate and long-term management of this disaster.

It is well known that there is no way of physically stopping the algal bloom or its effects now, and that all we can hope to achieve is to manage the negative effects on the people that it's affecting. To that end, the Federal and South Australian governments have committed to funding different initiatives to assist with the management of the algal bloom disaster, including but not limited to research, monitoring, and industry support grants. These resources have been absolutely vital. The Federal government needs to ensure that it continues to provide sufficient funding to help South Australians through this very difficult time. This terrible algal bloom scenario desperately needs the appropriate label of **national disaster** to unlock the funding and departmental resources to deal with this very serious and devastating event.

Solutions for the marine scale fishery

At the foundational level, there must be better environmental management to prevent this from happening again, and so we have healthy seas and coastal environments.

Appropriate Government funding must be allocated to the Marine scalefish fishing industry to support its recovery until fish stocks have returned to sustainable levels, once again enabling the sustainable harvesting of commercially important species. This will need to include ongoing financial support for fishers.

After the bloom period has concluded, there will need to be an evaluation of the number of fish that are left in the sea. There will be a need to reduce the number of fish that are taken by fishers to ensure that the fish can repopulate to good levels as quickly as possible and restore the correct balance to the marine ecosystem. To ensure that our conservation goals are achieved, it is likely to be necessary to significantly reduce the catch quotas taken and also reduce commercial fishing licenses using government buyback programs. The government must provide sufficient resources for this critical conservation pathway.

Mental health support is needed now and will continue to be very important for South Australia's Marine Scale commercial fishery. The stay afloat program is aimed at and designed for fishers and their families; the stay afloat program must be resourced generously.

In concluding my submission, I would like to thank the Senate inquiry members for this opportunity to provide a written submission,

Your faithfully

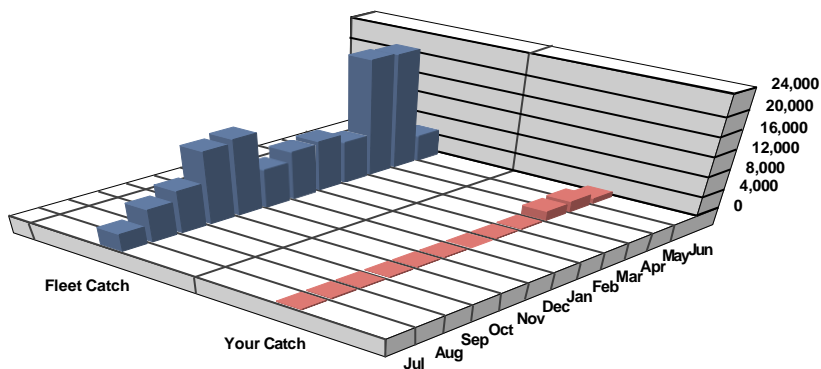
Bartholomew Butson

References

Department of Primary Industries and Regions, PIRSA Quota Balance Statement, August 2025

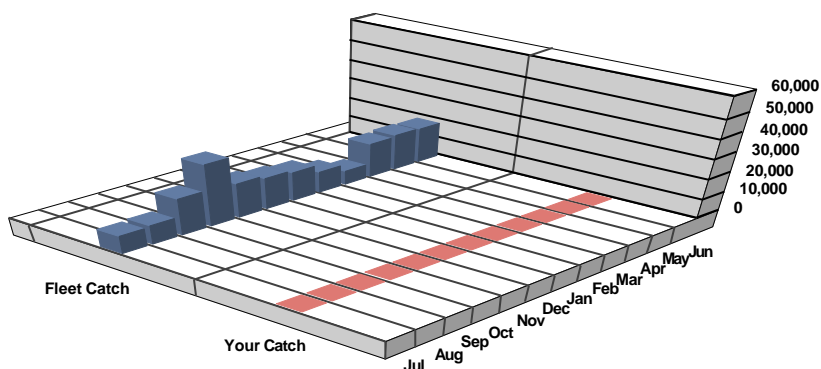
Calamari - Gulf St Vincent Zone July 2024 – June 2025

Month	Your Catch	Fleet Catch
Jul	99.50	3,522.90
Aug	122.70	6,612.20
Sep	70.80	8,516.20
Oct	75.10	14,596.50
Nov	54.20	15,338.00
Dec	22.40	7,591.70
Jan	0.00	9,513.60
Feb	33.50	10,155.10
Mar	100.80	8,252.20
Apr	1,866.20	23,247.10
May	2,146.50	22,950.20
Jun	989.50	4,944.50
	5,581.20	135,240.20



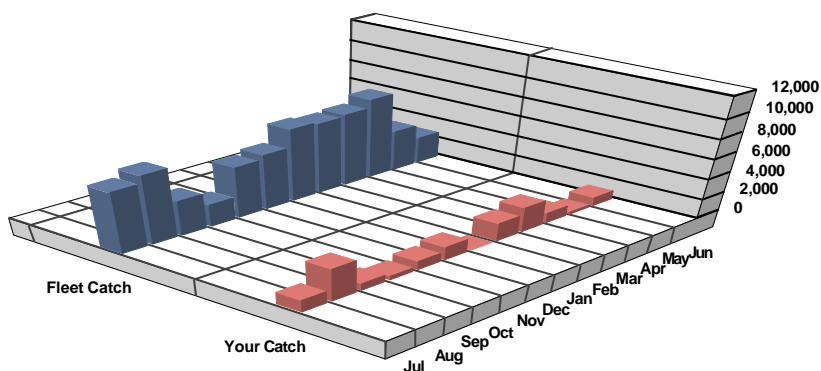
Calamari - Spencer Gulf Zone

Month	Your Catch	Fleet Catch
Jul	0.00	8,959.30
Aug	0.00	9,520.50
Sep	0.00	18,478.50
Oct	0.00	31,261.10
Nov	0.00	17,350.30
Dec	0.00	15,813.00
Jan	0.00	14,563.50
Feb	0.00	10,665.10
Mar	0.00	6,962.20
Apr	0.00	17,378.30
May	0.00	18,139.50
Jun	0.00	17,733.10
	0.00	186,824.40



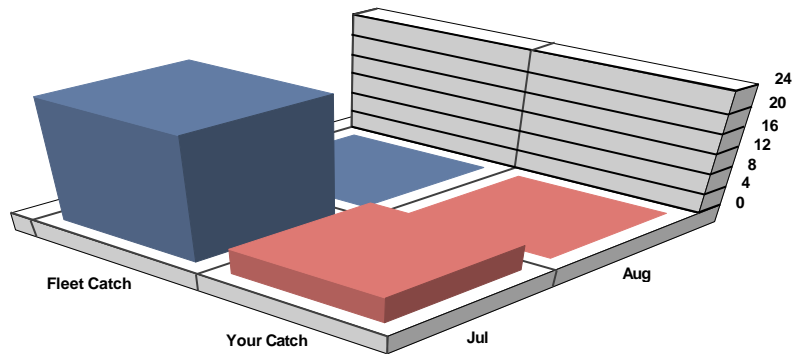
Garfish - Gulf St Vincent Zone

Month	Your Catch	Fleet Catch
Jul	1,174.00	6,156.90
Aug	3,210.00	6,867.20
Sep	657.00	3,412.10
Oct	351.50	2,131.50
Nov	849.00	5,105.40
Dec	1,287.00	5,518.10
Jan	0.00	7,272.50
Feb	1,781.00	7,052.70
Mar	2,475.50	7,207.80
Apr	1,005.00	7,983.70



Calamari - Gulf St Vincent Zone July 2025 – August 2025

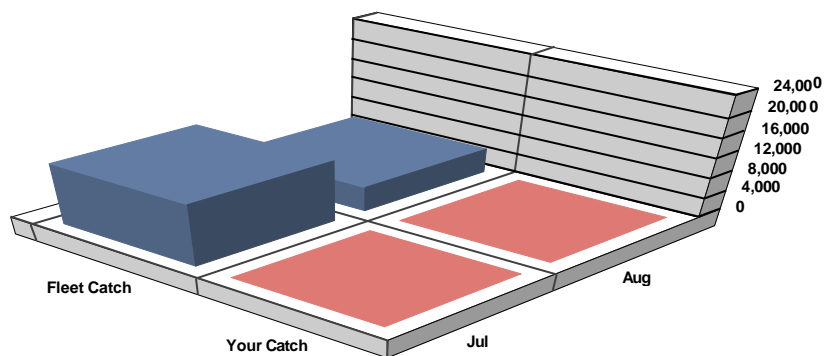
Month	Your Catch	Fleet Catch
Jul	5.00	24.00
Aug	0.00	0.00



5.00 24.00

Calamari - Spencer Gulf Zone

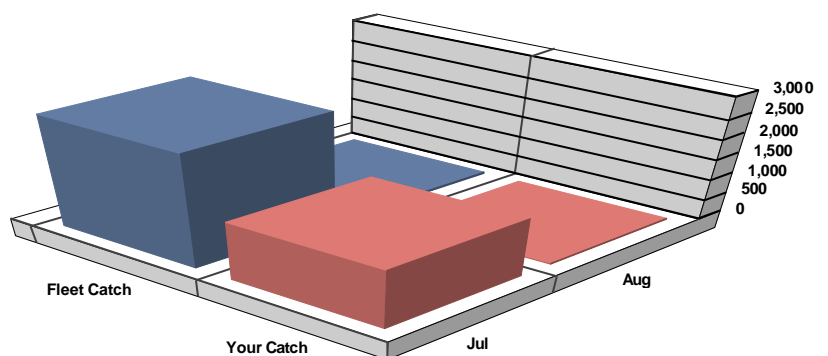
Month	Your Catch	Fleet Catch
Jul	0.00	12,321.90
Aug	0.00	4,944.70



0.00 17,266.60

Garfish - Gulf St Vincent Zone

Month	Your Catch	Fleet Catch
Jul	1,430.00	2,743.00
Aug	23.00	35.00



1,453.00 2,778.00