



***SOUTHERN FISHERMEN'S ASSOCIATION***  
***Ethical, Sustainable Harvest***

22 August 2025

Committee Secretary  
Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Committee Secretary

Please find attached the Southern Fishermen's Association (SFA) submission to the Environment and Communications Reference Committee (ECRC) enquiry into Algal Blooms in South Australia.

The SFA are a peak body representing licence holders in the South Australian Lakes and Coorong Fishery (LCF). The SFA are members of Seafood Industry South Australia (SISA) and are party to and supportive of the submission to the ECRC made by SISA on this matter.

In addition to supporting the submission made by SISA this submission relates to specific issues in the LCF which relate to the Terms of Reference of the Committee. The LCF is a multi-species multi gear fishery which targets finfish and pipi in the Coorong, Lower Lakes and Murray Mouth (CLLMM) region of South Australia. Details on the fishery can be found in the Management Plan for the Commercial Lakes and Coorong Fishery on the Department of Primary Industries and Regions South Australia (PIRSA) website:  
[https://www.pir.sa.gov.au/primary\\_industry/commercial\\_fishing/commercial\\_fisheries/lakes\\_and\\_coorong\\_fishery](https://www.pir.sa.gov.au/primary_industry/commercial_fishing/commercial_fisheries/lakes_and_coorong_fishery)

Since the onset of the harmful algal bloom (HAB) in South Australia earlier in 2025, both the Pipi and finfish components of the fishery have been impacted. The Pipi component is on the ocean beach outside the estuary and since July 2025 the commercial Pipi harvest has been closed for the harvest of Pipi for human consumption. The SFA is working with other commercial fisheries and aquaculture sectors, PIRSA, SA Health and the Commonwealth Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry on testing for toxins to ensure human health and market access are maintained or reinstated in the future.

With regards to the finfish component of the fishery, much of the harvest of fish within the LCF are influenced by the environment. This brings the SFA to the specific point within the Terms of Reference in which this submission covers:

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

*a. contributing environmental, land management or water quality factors;*

Although the duration, scale and impact of the HAB in South Australia has been unprecedented it is acknowledged by many stakeholders that these factors could not have been foreseen and prepared for in the marine environment in South Australia. Given the HAB is ongoing there is a significant amount of investment into research into the cause and potential mitigation measures if this was to occur again in future years.

While the HAB itself was unforeseen, the SFA believe the anomaly regarding preparedness in South Australia relates to the environmental condition of the CLLMM. Specifically this relates to the timing of water delivery, duration and flow through the delivery of environmental water from the Murray Darling Basin (MDB). The issues of timing and delivery of environmental water have been discussed for many years, through the development of the Murray Darling Basin Plan and many other policy and management documents.

Within the Coorong the issues of water management are a constant challenge to maintain a healthy ecosystem. The current HAB event is also challenging fishers in the fishery who currently have limited capacity to harvest Piri for sale for human consumptions due to the high levels of Brevetoxin due to the presence of *K. Mikimoto*.

There have been numerous algal bloom events and fish kills within areas of the LCF over many years. One cause of this is the condition of the Southern Lagoon of the Coorong, which has deteriorated over time to a point it is being likened to a toxic swill by licence holders due to the water and benthic habitat quality in the region. Since the 2022 flood of the MDB provided some respite for species in the South Lagoon due to better water quality for a period. This has been deteriorating since 2022. The North Lagoon of the Coorong has traditionally provided a refuge for fish and other associated species, even though periods of low flow and challenging environmental conditions.

The 2025 HAB entered the Coorong Lagoon through the Murray Mouth in late May 2025 on the back of a tidal surge and wind conditions which pushed the coastal HAB infected water into the Coorong Lagoon. There is some discussion that delivery of environmental water during that time may have mitigated some of the risks of the HAB taking hold due to its challenge when surviving in lower seawater salinities. Once the HAB took hold in the Seven Mile section of the North Lagoon of the Coorong there were immediate effects on the biota and small fish species in the area. Luckily the HAB did not spread within the CLLMM and remained localised in the area.

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The SFA specifically asks the ECRC to investigate if water management through the delivery of environmental water could be used to stop a HAB from establishing in the future. Can the ECRC also investigate water management more generally in the MDB with the aim of rehabilitation of degraded habitat (South Lagoon), building resilience and ecosystem health of the CLLMM thus reducing ongoing HAB events and the risk of future events on a broad scale. This in effect will assist in the system responding to and recovering from any HAB or other environmental stressors in the future.

To inform this investigation the SFA can confirm several productive discussions have occurred between SFA members and Government representatives, both on recognised reference groups like the Department of Environment and Water Community Advisory Panel and the statutory and non-statutory versions of the Coorong Environmental Trust. Productive discussions continue with the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder around these issues as well the acknowledgement by all parties that the delivery of environmental water in 2025/26 should also consider mitigation of risks from the HAB.

If you require any further information on this submission please contact Keith Rowling, Executive Officer, SFA

Yours sincerely

**Keith Rowling**  
**Executive Officer**

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