

Isadora Poole

*Australian Youth Climate Coalition
South Australia*



Submission to Environment and Communications References Committee

Re: Algal blooms in South Australia

Dear Chair,

We write to you as young people living in South Australia and representing those young people fighting for climate justice within the state of South Australia. The recent algal bloom, brought on by factors such as warming waters caused by the climate crisis poses huge risks to our marine life, coastal communities health and future generations enjoyment of South Australia's stunning coastal landscapes.

Australian Youth Climate Coalition

The Australian Youth Climate Coalition (AYCC) is Australia's largest youth-led not-for-profit organisation. We act as an independent, non-profit, non-partisan organisation, building a generation-wide movement to create just solutions to the climate crisis by educating, inspiring, empowering and mobilising young Australians around the issue. Our organisation currently has over 200,000 supporters and dozens of local grassroots groups all around Australia.

We write this submission on behalf of AYCC South Australia, representing the voices of young people in urban, and regional South Australia.

Summary

We seek to highlight the voices of young people in South Australia and our collective concern over the impacts of the algal bloom emergency on the environment, climate, health and wellbeing.

We are growing up in the face of a polycrisis. We are forced to fight on many fronts, from climate change to mass biodiversity loss and the increasing pollution of our air, waterways, and soils.

With increasing climate and biodiversity crises, we feel betrayed time and time again by the lack of national attention and quick response by the Australian government. The algal bloom on the South Australian coastline is a national emergency. We fear now and for a future of continuing loss of marine life, loss of access to our precious landscapes, and our communities health with an increase in algal bloom events fuelled by climate change.

We need an urgent clean up effort, but beyond that we need a national fossil fuel phase out plan which sees a net-zero target by 2035 to mitigate the risk of future disasters such as this one. The science is clear; warmer waters and unpredictable weather patterns brought on by the climate crisis contributes to the frequency and intensity of algal blooms¹. Australia's continued approval of new fossil fuel projects jeopardises a future where we can enjoy the South Australian coastline, protect our coastal communities' health and ensure thriving marine ecosystems.

As young people living in South Australia, we hold a different vision for the future of our home. We want investment in the needs of the community, like health and education. We want renewable energy, no more fossil fuel projects. Our communities deserve better. All of us want clean air and water, a healthy environment, and a safe future to grow up in.

As we look forward towards possibly hosting COP31 in 2026 in South Australia, we know we need demonstrable Australian leadership on the climate crisis and environmental matters, which can be perceived through critical moments such as this algal bloom crisis. We demand that the Federal Government take the necessary measures to act upon the current algal bloom crisis and take the steps to prevent future crises like it by implementing a net-zero by 2035 emissions plan.

¹ https://www.epa.sa.gov.au/environmental_info/water_quality/harmful-algal-blooms

AYCC member comments

Clarissa

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My name is Clarissa, I'm 19 years old and live in Adelaide. I'm an ordinary young person who is passionate about accessibility, the environment and the way others impact the world around them (and how the world impacts them).

The algal bloom has made it very hard for me to feel comfortable going to the beach. I've had to tell my mum I don't want to go to the beach, even though I know how much she loves it. The algae bloom has changed it for me. I used to think of it as a safe and relaxing place, but now I feel scared of what I might see when I get there. The thought of dead fish and animals washed up on the sand is upsetting, and it makes me anxious just imagining it. This has affected my mental wellbeing, because the beach used to be somewhere I would go with my family to unwind but now it feels like a place I want to avoid. I wish I could share Mum's joy in being there, but right now I'd rather stay away than worry about what's waiting on the shore. Saying "no" to her is difficult, but I feel I have to protect myself from the distress of seeing those animals.

The big thing I would say to ALL parliamentarians is that the bloom doesn't just damage the environment, it impacts how people live and feel in their own communities. For me, it's about fear and sadness. Something as simple as going to the beach now feels like a risk. I don't think enough is recognised about how much this weighs on people's mental health, especially young people like me who don't want to be confronted with suffering animals.

I think governments need to take both short-term and long-term action. In the short term, there should be a faster clean-up of beaches so communities don't have to face the distress of seeing dead animals, and clear public updates about the risks and conditions. This would help people feel safer and more informed. In the long term, governments should invest in research and solutions to prevent algae blooms in the first place, by addressing water pollution, agricultural runoff, and climate change. Stronger cooperation between local, state, and federal levels would make sure communities aren't left to deal with the impacts on their own.

Carlos

5125

Declare this a national emergency. This has implications across the community. Stop telling people this is safe when there is no evidence that is the case. This will create a public health issue. It wreaks havoc on our mental health to have to witness dead animals washing up and I worry for the children to bear witness to this also. Listen to the experts, the climate scientists, the conservationists, they told you this would happen. It's a disgrace for our state to have this climate event happening a year before COP31 comes to our shores.

Kelvin

5000

Really crucial to stop the pollution because the algal blooms bring negative impacts to the habitats and sea life. Stand up for the empathy of not just humans , but other living beings and most importantly - life of our Mother Earth
And that's love , that's care , and that's justice.

Natasha

5141

If we needed one more example of how human-induced climate change is going to cause damage to our environment, health and economy, now we have one, right on our doorstep, for everyone to see. Not in some far off country, or as a natural disaster able to be attributed to another 'once in 100-year' weather system, but lapping on our pristine shorelines.

The algal bloom has killed thousands of marine animals and endangered the breeding grounds of our unique wildlife in ways we still aren't able to measure. Off the back of extreme drought in the country, how much more are we being asked to endure?

People have reported becoming ill from contact with algal water, not to mention the untold mental impact on South Australians from being at the centre of a crisis without support for so long. We feel like we've been forgotten and left behind just because we're a smaller state and thus aren't worth the attention of the East Coast. If algae was lapping at the shores of Byron Bay, I guarantee it would be labelled a crisis from day one.

I serve fish in the deli of the supermarket I work at and often get asked, "is this fish from here [South Australia]? I don't want it if it's local" and though our fish isn't from SA it's heartbreaking that people don't want to eat locally sourced food. This is just a small example of how ocean-based businesses have suffered and will continue to suffer long after the crisis is over from the perception of tainted waters, even though it is not our waters which are contaminated, but our skies.

South Australian seas experienced a marine heatwave last year, which combined with the Murray flood provided perfect conditions for algal bloom. These events will only become more frequent. Australia punches above its weight in pumping greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, for energy we don't even get access to. And in the meantime, we are being asked to suffer the triple threat of environment, health and economic degradation and ignore the reasons why.