

18/08/2025

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

To the Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications,

On behalf of the group who call ourselves 'Chilly Pits', I write to share our experience of the South Australian algal bloom.

Since November 2022, Chilly Pits has convened at Glenelg beach at sunrise, twice a week, every week, to dip in the ocean. This routine was inspired by many motivations; we are all lovers of nature and submerging ourselves in it, visually and physically, was a no-brainer to celebrate the abundance of beauty and diversity in our natural world. As young adults, this routine also provided an escape from the hustle of Monday to Friday work, building up community and giving us something to look forward to beyond the weekend.

We ran into the ocean on calm mornings with stretching sunlight and on windy mornings in rain. We ran under sky on fire colours and in frosty single-digit temperatures. On public holidays and vacations, we took this tradition to other spots on South Australia's coast, appreciating the beauty on offer in our home state. On many occasions, we delighted in sharing our ocean with a rich array of critters and creatures - curious rays would approach to say hello, seals would pass by in our background, dolphins both far and near to our aquatic gathering. One particularly memorable morning, one member had his toe pinched by a crab. We found this endlessly amusing.

In summary, we are committed fans of South Australia's oceans.

Our dips have been paused since July 2025 following advice from SA Health about avoiding swimming in water that is discoloured, foamy, and at spots with dead or injured marine life. We convened at our usual spot in Glenelg to make this decision and were met with a beach littered with creatures washed up on the shore, lifeless and left to rot.

This devastation is impactful to our community for a number of reasons.

The first, our loss of morning swims is a loss of our sense of self. Swimming in the ocean helped us feel part of something larger than ourselves, connecting us with the diverse aquatic creature population and the other morning swimmers braving cold conditions. These connections, crossing generational lines, class, even species - they have been instrumental in breaking out of the bubbles our modern world can trap us in. This has been all the more impactful during the winter season, where enduring cold water has previously been a tonic

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for seasonal blues. It may sound ridiculous when so many loathe getting into cold water at the best of times - but doing so provides an adrenaline rush that we have gotten addicted to. Cold water also helps build resilience; we have long appreciated the sense of accomplishment and self-trust getting chilly brings. Now, without access to our beloved natural 'high', our mental health is suffering.

The second, seeing the ocean so clearly in distress is obviously disturbing. All of us are appreciators of nature beyond our morning swims, ranging from outdoor enthusiasts to one of us with an ecology degree. We know this scale of marine creature death has an impact on the ocean's ecosystem and we are incredibly concerned about the ongoing impacts this algal bloom will have in the future. This only furthers our suffering mental health as well.

The third, we feel incredibly hopeless from the scale of this event and the lack of solutions. We are a cohort of young millennials and old gen-zs; we have grown up with narratives around individual action to curb climate change. We were taught not to litter and to pick up rubbish even if it is not ours. We were raised using canvas bags instead of plastic and taught to purchase metal straws and reusable coffee cups. All of us grew up in the millennium drought and remember shorter showers as a staple of our civilian duty.

Now, the oceans we are privileged to have access to are in crisis - and our civilian duty feels all for nought.

We have grown up learning about climate change and we are now reaping the impacts of unresponsive policy from slow-moving decision-makers who are leaving us with a problem we have inherited since birth.

This bloom, spurred on from flooding in the River Murray in 2022-23 and a marine heatwave, is a domino well down the line in a climate change chain. And it is no longer enough to pretend that picking up litter and using reusable straws is enough to take action on climate change.

Any solutions to the algal bloom that do not address the root cause - climate change - will be inadequate. It is not enough to fund research into the bloom and its impacts on marine environments - though that is important.

We must see big corporations held to account when it comes to their practices. Our country's reliance on fossil fuels, both for energy and for employment, needs to shift to sustainable renewables. The oil and gas conglomerates cannot keep destroying Australia for profit while the rest of us pay a price we cannot afford - the slow death of our natural world.

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There is more we could say - we are a bunch of intelligent individuals who dive into nuance into all our discussions. We trust this committee will hear from a wide range of perspectives and know many will be more greatly impacted by the bloom beyond 'no more ocean swims at sunrise'. However, staring down the barrel of an indefinite hiatus from a recreational activity that fostered connection and community, to both other people and nature itself, we feel helpless.

And in time, we know we will be able to get our (arm)pits chilly again, as our name decrees - but without bold policy and big changes, we will only be biding our time before this happens again. Or waiting for something worse to come along.

There is only so long you can kick a can down the road before it will trip you up.

Thank you,
Chilly Pits