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Watt Commits \$14m to Tackle South Australia's Toxic Algal Bloom Crisis

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The Australian federal government's \$14 million pledge to address South Australia's (SA) toxic algal bloom, a devastating environmental crisis killing marine life. It explores the response's adequacy, local impacts, and concerns over government priorities, emphasizing practical action over bureaucratic delays.

Since March 2025, a toxic algal bloom, primarily driven by the microalgae *Karenia mikimotoi*, has ravaged SA's coastline, spanning 4,400 square kilometers—roughly the size of Kangaroo Island. The bloom, fueled by a marine heatwave with sea temperatures 2.5°C above average, has killed tens of thousands of marine animals across 450 species, devastating fisheries and tourism. On July 21, 2025, Federal Environment Minister Murray Watt announced a \$14 million package to support SA's response, following a state government request. “This is a serious event, and we're stepping up,” Watt said at a press conference in Adelaide, noting the funds would address short-term cleanup and long-term recovery needs.

The package, while welcomed, has drawn criticism for its scope and timing. SA Premier Peter Malinauskas, who lobbied for federal aid, called it a step forward but stressed the need for more robust measures. Greens Senator Sarah Hanson-Young, speaking on *ABC's Afternoon Briefing*, argued the \$14 million is “nowhere near enough” and criticized the Labour government's refusal to declare a national disaster, which would unlock broader support. She suggested the response would have been swifter if the crisis hit Sydney's Bondi Beach. Local fishers, like those represented by Seafood Industry South Australia, report near-total losses, with oyster farms shuttered and diving sites like The Claris shipwreck described as an “underwater Chernobyl” by diver Mark Tozer.

Skeptics question the Labour government's focus, arguing domestic crises like this deserve priority over international commitments. The Department for Environment and Water (DEW) notes the bloom's resilience, with winter winds failing to dissipate it, raising fears it could persist for months. While the funding aids immediate cleanup, long-term solutions—like addressing marine heatwaves tied to climate shifts—

remain uncertain. The government's measured response, avoiding a disaster declaration, reflects caution but risks alienating communities demanding urgent, decisive action to save SA's coasts.