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## Mysterious Coastal Stench in Australia Traced to Natural Wetlands, Not Failing Infrastructure

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As complaints pour in from residents along Australia’s eastern coastline about an unbearable “rotten egg” odour, many initially blamed broken sewer lines or leaking wastewater systems. But investigations have revealed a surprising and far less alarming culprit: nature itself.

Across Queensland’s coastal communities, particularly between the Sunshine Coast and Noosa, locals have long noticed a seasonal stench they assumed came from faulty infrastructure. Regional utility company *Unitywater*, which manages water and wastewater

services for over 800,000 people, was flooded with reports of foul smells in recent months. However, according to Unitywater executive manager Rhett Duncan, the source isn't man-made at all; it's the result of a natural process involving mangroves and seasonal conditions.

“When mangroves drop their seeds, bacteria help break down the organic matter, producing a sulphur-based reaction, which in turn creates *hydrogen sulphide* gas, responsible for that rotten egg smell,” Duncan explained. The odour, often mistaken for a sewer leak, becomes especially pungent from May through November when cooler temperatures trap the gas near the ground.

Hydrogen sulphide is a natural by-product of decaying plant material in low-oxygen environments, such as wetlands. While the gas is harmless in these outdoor concentrations, it carries a strong, unmistakable stench. The seasonal spike in complaints is largely due to the way weather patterns and tidal activity interact with local drainage systems. In areas near swamps or tidal creeks, the smell can be pushed up through stormwater drains by rising tides or prevailing winds.

Social media users have added their voices to the growing chorus. One visitor to Port Douglas asked bluntly, “Why is Port Douglas stinky?” while a local replied that the combination of full moon tides and mangrove activity regularly pushes the smell into residential areas. Another resident explained how incoming tides force the odour through exposed pipe systems, intensifying the experience during seasonal shifts.

While some residents still argue that the government should do more, the science behind the odour tells a different story. Unlike man-made pollution or failing infrastructure, issues that can be addressed with investment and accountability, this is a case of natural biology at work. Mangroves, which serve as vital ecosystems that protect coastlines and support marine life, simply emit a foul smell as part of their normal cycle.

Unitywater, for its part, emphasises that it takes all odour complaints seriously and prioritises investigations to ensure there are no faults in the wastewater network. “We encourage residents who notice an odour to consider whether it may be coming from nearby wetlands or waterways,” Duncan said.

The broader concern here isn't just the smell but what it reflects about growing coastal populations and urban sprawl encroaching into natural areas. As development continues along high-value coastal real estate, the boundaries between nature and suburbia are

increasingly blurred. Unfortunately, that also means living closer to nature's less glamorous side, like the occasional sulfur cloud wafting up from the wetlands.

For many, it's an annual nuisance they've grown to tolerate, much like summer heat or seasonal allergies. But others remain frustrated that these kinds of quality-of-life issues aren't addressed more aggressively, especially as Australia's government focuses attention and resources elsewhere, particularly in areas that often ignore the needs of long-time residents in favour of politically fashionable causes.

As Christmas approaches and humidity increases, the stench is likely to grow worse before it gets better. But for now, coastal Australians are left holding their noses and reminding themselves: it's not the sewer, it's just the swamp.