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Greens Initiate Senate Probe into South Australia's Toxic Algal Bloom Disaster

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The Australian Greens have initiated a Senate inquiry, led by Senator Sarah Hanson-Young, to investigate the devastating toxic algal bloom caused by *Karenia mikimotoi* that has ravaged South Australia's coastline since March 2025. This article examines the inquiry's goals, the environmental and economic damage, and criticisms of the Labor government's response to the crisis.

On July 23, 2025, the Senate's Environment and Communications References Committee, chaired by Hanson-Young, received approval to examine the harmful algal bloom (HAB) that has resulted in the death of more than 13,800 marine animals across 400 species. The bloom has severely impacted South Australia's fishing and tourism industries. "This disaster demands accountability and action," Hanson-Young told *The Guardian*, highlighting the need to investigate water quality, government shortcomings, and strategies for long-term prevention.

The inquiry is scheduled to present its findings by October 28. It will focus on the bloom's expansion from the Fleurieu Peninsula to Adelaide's Port River, which scientists link to a 2.5°C marine heatwave and nutrient-rich runoff from the 2022-23 River Murray floods. The bloom has covered approximately 4,500 square kilometres, leaving beaches strewn with dead fish, dolphins, and sharks.

The South Australian Research and Development Institute (SARDI) associates the crisis with climate-driven environmental conditions. Ecologist Faith Coleman warned that without cooling winter temperatures, the bloom could last up to 18 months. The inquiry aims to consider solutions such as improved monitoring systems and oyster reef restoration, building on a \$28 million state and federal funding package. However, opposition leader David Speirs criticized the funding as inadequate, describing it as a "drop in the ocean" compared to the scale of the environmental disaster. He also called for a royal commission to investigate systemic failures.

The Albanese government's refusal to declare the event a national disaster has drawn criticism from Liberal Senator Andrew McLachlan, who argued this limits the level of support available to affected

communities. With mussel farms shut down and tourism declining, the opposition contends that Labor's climate policies emphasize appearances over practical measures. While the Senate inquiry offers a path toward greater accountability, stakeholders are urging urgent and substantial action to protect South Australia's marine ecosystems and economic future.