

Harmful Algal Bloom Tourism Industry impacts:

Summary of feedback from insights survey



How tourism businesses are being impacted:

Reduced Bookings and Revenue Loss:

Businesses, particularly those reliant on water-based activities, reported a sharp decline in visitor numbers, foot traffic and booking cancellations. This decline was especially notable in May and June, with some respondents citing the quietest months on record.

This impact is starting to be experienced by businesses that are not marine based and had previously felt insulated (ie accommodation businesses). Coastal accommodation operators are even reporting cancellations of bookings for October and November.

Access Limitations:

Closures of boat ramps, jetties, and foreshore areas due to safety concerns have directly impeded operations for charters, tours, and beach-based services.

Water Quality and Health Concerns:

Murky, discoloured water and strong odours have deterred visitors, raising health and safety concerns. This has led to the suspension of operations in some cases.

Media and Messaging Damage:

Negative, mis-informed messaging, lack of factual/current communications from authorities, media coverage and social media comments have amplified public concerns, compounding the downturn in visitation. The negative perception of marine activities and destinations appears to be spreading across more general tourism markets. This has meant businesses have been impacted even where the algal bloom has not been present.

Operational Disruptions:

Some businesses have had to adapt or suspend specific services, resulting in logistical and staffing challenges.

Psychological:

There is a sense of hopelessness and distress about what the algal bloom signifies from a larger and longer-term environmental perspective, and the reality of what can be done to address the current bloom and prevent future ones.

How government (state or federal) should respond:

Financial Assistance Programs:

Strong calls were made for immediate financial relief, including grants or subsidies similar to COVID-19 support. Respondents stressed the urgency of compensation to offset income losses and support operational continuity.

There is a reluctance from some businesses about government 'handouts'. Businesses value their resilience and independence, however in exceptional circumstances, such as this, financial assistance/target support is necessary and justified due to the severity of impacts.

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Clear and Accurate Communication:

Respondents emphasised the need for consistent and transparent updates from authorities. Misinformation or lack of updates has led to fear-driven cancellations.

Environmental Research and Intervention:

There is frustration at a perceived inaction or lack of foresight, hinting at a desire for stronger environmental governance, and need for honesty and transparency about potential forewarnings and regulatory oversight.

Some respondents urged the government to identify the cause of the bloom and implement remediation efforts to prevent recurrence. Moving beyond short-term relief and addressing root causes should also be a focus.

Strategic Tourism Marketing and Promotion in recovery phase:

Targeted marketing campaigns to rebuild consumer confidence once conditions improve. Promotional efforts should clarify when regions are safe and visually appealing again.

Industry Recommendations

Based on feedback, government should take the following action:

1. **Emergency Financial Relief:**
Introduce direct support packages for impacted tourism operators, especially micro and small businesses in coastal communities.
2. **Crisis Communication Strategy:**
Establish a cross-agency task force to provide regular, factual updates on bloom conditions and health implications.
3. **Scientific Investigation:**
Fund and fast-track scientific studies into the causes, patterns, and prevention of harmful algal blooms in SA's marine systems.
4. **Industry Engagement:**
Engage local business owners in response planning to ensure policies reflect ground-level realities and encourage long-term recovery.
5. **Tourism Recovery Fund:**
Allocate funding for marketing and promotional activities focused on rebuilding confidence in marine and coastal destinations.

About the impact insights survey

- The Survey opened 1 July, closed 14 July.
- 93 responses received.
- Respondents represent the following business types:
 - Marine tourism operators
 - Accommodation
 - Local retail/services
 - Agritourism / food production
 - Hospitality
 - Recreation & wellness
- The survey invited tourism businesses to respond to the following two questions:
 - Tell us how the algal bloom is impacting your business
 - What do you think state and federal government should be doing in response to the algal bloom and the impact on your business?