

# THE BLOOM



A photographic and  
written word response  
to the harmful algal bloom



## Foreward

Sea lovers, beach goers, swimmers, surfers, dog walkers, sun bathers, snorkelers, bench sitters, paddlers, fisher people, sailors, birdwatchers, sand-castle engineers, splashers, pipi gatherers, divers, meditators, sunrise and sunset snappers have all been caught by this persistently severe Harmful Algal Bloom. The precarious present of airborne toxins, dead creatures, foaming beaches and scummed water suspend us between a nostalgic before and an unknown future.

It's almost impossible to prepare for ecological disaster; traumatic to regularly witness mass kills or be unable to save dying sea creatures struggling for breath, exhausted, emaciated, flesh and organs haemorrhaging from brevetoxins; and devastating to feel powerless to immediately change an embedded fossil fuel dominance that we know will result in future ecocide. In the context of planetary time balances do shift — however our current epoch, the Anthropocene, is defined by uncertainty and catastrophic events.

Here, 50,000 years ago, you could head west from present day Port Noarlunga, walk on dry land and cross several rivers to arrive at Port Lincoln. First Nations, primarily the Kaurana, Narungga, Nukunu, and Barngarla peoples sustainably stewarded this country for millennia, establishing information and trading hubs and engineering massive stone fish traps older than the pyramids. Then, around 6,500 years ago, those rivers became the gulfs and peninsulas, islands and bays, beaches and rocky cliffs that we recognise today.

Now, while citizen scientists have sprung into action in unprecedented numbers to collect and catalogue the carnage in underwater graveyards and on suburban beaches; marine ecologists rigorously research causes and propose future measures; and media and politicians minimise perception of harm, it is artists and writers who speak to the heart of the matter. Those involved in *The Bloom* exhibition and publication share the commonality of being deeply moved by this oceanic calamity and of taking responsive action through creative practice.

By capturing and constructing powerful images and texts, individually and collectively they address the enormous impact this toxic bloom has had on coastal communities. Grief must come first as whole sea populations are decimated, lifestyles curtailed, and business halted  $\frac{3}{4}$  yet there is space for unexpected awe at the magnificence and diversity of our previously unseen (now dead) sea neighbours. Spectacles of horror and expressions of tender care, respect the current fragility of oceanic ecosystems and celebrate resilience.

Some envisage a restoration of pristine sea country brimming with life and energy; others reflect on humanity's environmental damage and call for urgent remediation; there are invocations to gods and goddesses for compassion and remedy. However, the underlying current is a deep knowing that the reparative power of nature will prevail — either with or without us.

An in-balance algal bloom is a magnificent flourishing, but this ongoing, extreme marine mortality is a national disaster that sends a significant global warning signal. Bringing us together locally and creatively, *The Bloom* provides solace, honours lost lives and destroyed habitats; impelling care and change for the future of our community, sea country and planet.

Melinda Rackham writes on art, environment and social justice and is an Adjunct Research Professor at Adelaide University.

*The Bloom* exhibition and publication is a community response to the devastation of the harmful algal bloom which impacted South Australia's coastline from 2025 and the collective grief experienced by ocean-loving communities. The associated exhibition was held between 6 February — 16 March 2026 at the Arts Centre Port Noarlunga.

Curated by Zoë Brooks and proudly brought to you by the City of Onkaparinga, this community-focussed exhibition invites reflection and healing through creative dialogue, exploring our connection and loss of connection with the ocean.





## Curator's Statement

When first approached to curate another exhibition on the Harmful Algal Bloom, my first thought was – can I do this again?

These exhibitions are heavy, they embody huge amounts of collective grief, sadness and anger – my own included. I long to surf our beautiful once-pristine Mid Coast, to breathe clean ocean air. I miss my fishy-friends, and the endless days spent floating around on my surfboard. My happy place.

But what happens when it doesn't make you happy anymore?

*Toxic Surf* is a project born directly from the Harmful Algal Bloom. The very first public forum ever held was called *Toxic Surf* responding to surfers experiencing cold and flu-like symptoms after being in and around the water at Waitpinga. Good Bank Gallery in McLaren Vale, soon became the collective making ground for an oceanic lantern parade, bringing together First Nations speakers, scientists, artists, activists and ocean loving community to tell our collective story. About 400 people showed up to be in a lantern parade!

To be asked to curate *The Bloom* is a gift. It offers another chance to hold hope, to grieve and celebrate the resilience of our ocean loving community as we gather once more for each other and for our beloved ocean.

- Zoë Brooks

## Above:

Vicky Hollamby, *Remembrance*, 2025

A dead fish rests on sand, its body oriented toward the ocean as if in remembrance, evoking a sense of longing and displacement. This image invites reflection on South Australia's once-pristine beaches and a shared desire to return to a time before the algal bloom took hold.

## Cover image:

Andy Burnell, *Cowboys of the Apocalypse*, August 2025

Cowfish with their quirky looks and bright colours are a much-loved fish species in South Australia. With their slow swimming speed and small gill openings they have been badly impacted by the bloom. In this image they're zombies with exoskeletons bleached white by the sun and black empty eyes ride the algal bloom foam on Tennyson beach. Facebook: crab.E.cam

**Disclaimer:** The viewpoints and opinions expressed by the various writers in this publication do not necessarily represent the viewpoints and opinions of the City of Onkaparinga.





### **Strength**

Creatures on the sand  
Grieving people gather up  
Restoring hope now

- **Carrie Taylor**



## IMAGE OF A GENERATION

### Text to Image

Create a photo-realistic cinematic wide shot representation of a current day South Australian beach landscape at sunset. The white water reflects highlights of the yellowing cloudy sky.

Two people standing on the sand to the left of the frame, with their backs to the camera, are looking towards the setting sun and down to the water's edge.

They occupy about a fifth of the entire image. The adults right arm extends across the shoulder and back of the child with a firm grip, while their left-hand hangs limp below the cuff of their long-sleeve jacket.

The sandy beach is scattered with dead marine life. Fish of all shapes and sizes lay flat on various angles. Some dark brown seaweed and white foam is interspersed.

The beach surface has less than a third of the sand visible amidst the dark, glistening marine shapes. The irregular pattern of shapes continues along the sand and the water's edge to the boundary of the frame.

Near the right edge of the frame is the silhouette of a small rectangular sign on a pole inserted in the sand. The text of various sizes on the shaded side of the sign appears official but is not comprehensible.

Enter

- Neville Cichon

Opposite top:  
Neville Cichon,  
*No Entry 2025, 2021*

This unpublished photograph was taken in preparation for my 'Uprising' exhibition at Sauerbier House in 2021 that focused on the damaging human-led impacts to the ocean. Reviewing this concept in 2025, it now reflects how this major bloom restricted our entry into the ocean. Whether through advice, warnings or health impacts.

Opposite lower right:  
Lucy Cheeseman,  
*Rays Lost Days, 2025*

We don't know the pain you suffered. Sorry will never be enough because we didn't stop it. Now we know what we have lost we would've done whatever it cost to stop losing you ray.

I vow to keep being hopeful and be part of the answer. In memory of the majestic rays I will live my days making sure they haven't gone without cause and the effect is the fight to stop the next disaster. The way they move is consistent and majestic and will always be their legacy and that's now how I will be.

Opposite lower left:  
Carrie Taylor,  
*Strength, 2025*

Despite the horror and grief experienced during the algal bloom, people set aside their grief to collectively gather, collect, monitor and report the situation. This restores hope and faith in the community and in the future for the ocean.

Left written word:  
Neville Cichon,  
*Image of a Generation, 2025*

You can create an AI image by typing a description into a text to image computer program and hitting enter. This text prompt is light on some details to provide the opportunity for the reader to visualise their own image based on their experience and perspective. Encouraging imagination and reflection.



## Water Trial — Algal Bloom

slow

slow

sinking

down

ocean depth deathbed

fall

fall

they all

fall

down

slack

collapsed

deflated

eyes wide with death

shrunk, sunken, silenced

Oh, so many sea creatures perishing!

I am gutted, snared, hooked by their demise

crab-like I cringe

heart-sink.. dredged, trawled, tangled, in knots

this un-holy horror        I honour.

I stalk the Aldinga shoreline

where the wind whips my face... a dodgy smell stings

the pallor of the sea is seedy; filmy waves hoist heavily

foam creeps into seaweed clumps frothing

blue-finned fish grey the ground

the response mob pincer them into buckets

while Kwan Yin stands sentinel above Sellicks

her vessel of divine nectar arrested

white garments billowing stiff.



Above and opposite written word:

Renate Millionig, *Water Trial - Algal Bloom*, 2025.

This is part of a performance piece which includes dance and Japanese butoh walking — it is an offering to the ocean as healing.

Above right and opposite detail:

Mara Blazic, *Grange Green Sea Turtle*, 2025

Far from home this endangered green sea turtle washes up on Grange Beach. Government agencies fail to respond so volunteers race to save her. Sadly, she's too emaciated to recover. A majestic species dating back to the dinosaurs, her appearance serves as a permanent reminder of our seas in peril.



But I muse on Sedna  
ocean Goddess, Inuit maiden  
who dwells profound fathoms deep  
abandoned, wounded, betrayed, naked, cold, enraged  
her father fled on the surface after his cowardly attack  
her dismembered fingers birth fishes, seals, dolphins, walrus and whales  
she nets... all hurts, all fears, all trauma  
so do not shirk  
hers is the touch of death  
seep into deeps. descend full throated  
sink  
sink engulfed in her body eyes wide and wild  
marinate murmurate flow feel  
fill with whale song breaching, body resounding  
shell, cochlea, drum, shamanic healing heart...singing  
stroke her face, cradle her head, comb her tangled tresses  
release the refuse of centuries... cultures that kill  
without consequence, without ceremony  
through the grapevines, over the scarp, into the scrub  
lean into deep listening, linking arms, lighting lanterns  
birth prolific fishes  
bring pearls to the surface round as globes orbiting our Sun  
under-stand everything is interconnected  
everything created crafted with care...quantum, fractal  
numinous web of life woven  
in every breath we share, in every drop we drink  
everything animate and inanimate... is sentient,  
and is sensing...our kindness, our kinship,  
our cherishing.

- Renate Millonig







**Top:**

Andy Burnell, *Blue Bloom Wave*, 2025

The bloom affected different species at different times and they washed ashore in waves. In August 2025 Blue Weed Whiting started washing up in big numbers. People were shocked both on the beach and by the images. I was accused of creating this image in AI just because people didn't know we have gorgeous blue fish in South Australia. The odd one out is a female. Tennyson Beach.

**Opposite top right:**

Susan Belperio, *Broken Hearted*, 2025

Emerging from the loss experienced during our toxic algal bloom, I've left this and similar creations on the sand, challenging beachgoers to contemplate the oft-forgotten mollusc and echinoderm casualties that likely reach into the billions. These are my cathartic attempts to raise awareness via subtle yet transient beauty.

**Opposite top left written word:**

Jude Aquilina, *After the Bloom*, 2025

As a Fleurieu resident, I am shocked and horrified by the algal bloom. I remember my first walk on a foamy dead-fish-strewn South Coast beach, I felt devastated. This mass destruction of marine life is, in my opinion, the biggest tragedy for South Australia in the 21st century. Writing about what I see and feel has helped a little, to process this depressing event. I am pleased to see people creating art, music and literature in response to the bloom, and also admire the citizen scientists.

**Opposite lower:**

Marnya Rothe, *Fish From Bloom*, 2025

Marnya's new work, explores our collective loss of connection to the natural world. In these portraits, Marnya replaces her human subjects with found objects discarded by the sea during this year's algae bloom event in South Australia. The portraits explore the life once live to reveal the surprising beautiful worlds with-in each object still. They are a memory of, and a bridge back to, the natural world.



## After the Bloom

After the news reports and citizen science photos of floppy white rays and pink-mouthed sharks after the cockle cobble-stoned beach is swept by tide after tide and the frothy brown stain moves to another beach, someone has to sniff the air to gauge the cough factor, to walk a dog and pull a lead tight to stop it mouthing dried husks and stinking fish. Someone has to tell their children not to touch, and explain why they can't drag the pipi rake and wiggle hips to scoop a cache of glistening pink shells.

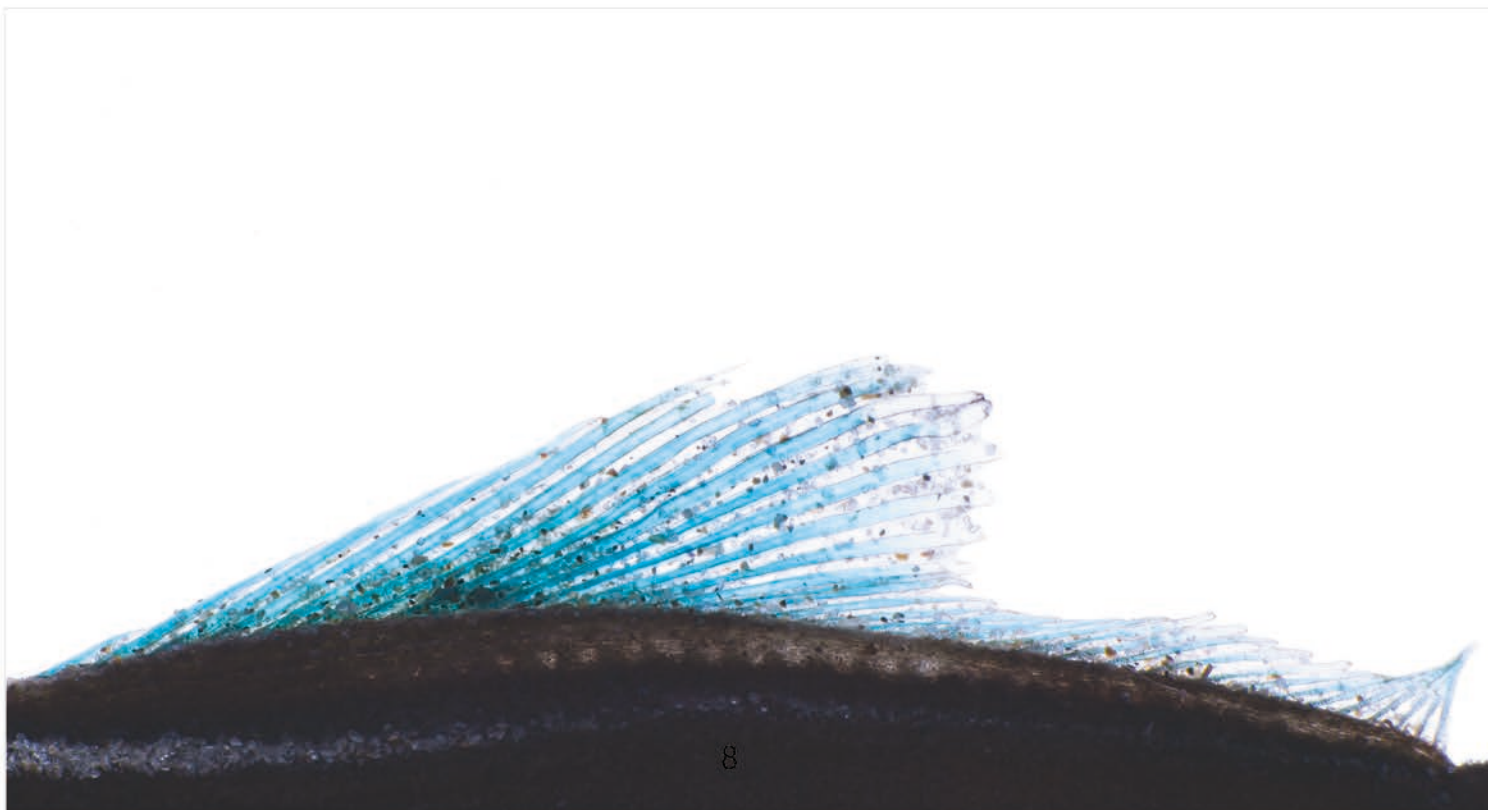
After the algal bloom, a fisherman has to don a Bunnings apron and wind up metres of net, sell their father's boat and see green rubber pants swaying like a hanged man on a hook in the shed. Someone has to count what's left, snorkel or dive into a murky graveyard, choke back grief behind goggles and photograph the carnage like a war reporter.

After the bloom moves on, someone has to describe to their children the synchronised fish dances sideways hustle of crabs, the carpet-patterned fiddlers and green scarfed leafy sea dragons; to open books and YouTube and show them what once was.



New holiday makers will walk our beaches  
speak of the pristine sand, no weeds, no shells  
How pure, they might say. Perhaps the sandy white  
fringe girdling Australia will be wiped clear  
and the scent of rotting seaweed and fishy air  
be just a memory in a grandparent's nostril.

**- Jude Aquilina**









## Algal Bloom: Despair to Hope

I have been having some dog days of late....my despair.

Our stunning front paddock, my spacious life affirming sea of optimism is now an ocean of deep dark despair.

Its once dynamic palate of aquamarine, is now stained to a muddy olive green to reflect its mood.

Our adored playground for all things aquatic has been plundered and poisoned.

Evil Algal Bloom, you have spirited away my daily blessing with your insidious microscopic slimy creep.

Waves of death wash up daily on the murky shore. The ocean floor is carpeted with dead rotting sea creatures of every species, great and small.

The sea-horse has bolted...

Algal Bloom, thief of my breath. Your foul airborne toxins continue to bubble up from the tide of your rotting flotsam and jetsam, carried on sea breezes to choke the land. Coastal plants and gardens are chemically burned by your noxious cloud.

Sad sea, sad shore, sick and gasping. All around... loss, grief and despair.

My Hope... is awakening each morning before dawn breaks, to find the right words... as does the first song bird of the day.

Having faith, in knowing that the sun will rise as the earth continues to turn on its axis, and that an omnipotent Nature will heal.

Thus, as my infinitesimal life boat of faith is tossed and hurled on this vast, deep dark and disturbed ocean, I see the lighthouse beam. Its rays of light a reassurance of hope for the future... enabling me to live creatively in the present.

Salty reflector of infinite heraldic sunsets, we surely have and will be blessed.

- Susan Oliver

### Above written word:

Sue Oliver, *Algal Bloom - Despair to Hope*, 2025

72 years plus. Born an amphibious woman of fertile Fleurieu earth.

Daily dipping into Moana dawns for many seasons.

Seeking chilled balance, body, mind and spirit.

My healer, my opiate, my soul's anchor.

Having now given up my morning communal swims due to the suffocating algal bloom. This is my desperate prayer to Mother Nature...

"O hear my cry for forgiveness and restoration".

### Opposite left:

Karoliina Kase, *Beaked Salmon, Still Alive*, 2025

From the series *When the Sea Held its Breath*:

Over the past months, I've created portraits of dead and dying sea life to humanize the crisis and document the scenes South Australian beachgoers have been witnessing over the past year. These images make the invisible suffering of marine creatures visible, shifting focus from statistics to the unique lives lost. The project invites viewers to confront this loss and reconsider their relationship with the ocean and its creatures.



## curse

we are swimming like two strands of rope twisted together.  
dissolved into infinitesimal shards,  
we are molten green glass;  
our solidity becomes liquid  
and the liquid becomes us, too.

the sun makes golden moons out of our faces—  
our hair billows like a sheet on the breeze,  
glowing in the pearly haze—  
and we fly through the viscous atmosphere,  
propelled by the current into a spiraling bud.

i scoop a cold cup of crystal with my honeycombed fins,  
the water whispering chills across my skin.  
metallic clouds brew in my stomach's rippling pit  
and i wonder if this is how we felt  
before we funneled ourselves into sublimation.

the water crests, soft labradorite swells  
arcing against thick opaque collapse.  
the cursive surface quakes as sea stars latch to our gaze,  
injecting cosmic garlands of tangerine sensation  
into our outstretched fleshy expanse.

we have always waited for a nebulous permission  
and now we plunge beyond its cusp—  
but as we float downward, the air sucks itself out of our lungs,  
aliveness swallowed by iridescent containment.  
the rope splays out, disintegrating and ragged, and  
we are clenched still; arrested by a sudden stiffness.

What curse have we cast upon this infinity?

- Adela Teubner

Above written word: Adela Teubner, *curse*, 2025

Opposite top:

Beverley Southcott, *Circle, Shoreline and Sand - One*, 2025

The beach is a spiritual sense of place for me where I meditate and reflect on all matters, worldly and unworldly. The recent algal bloom outbreak is a devastating environmental hazard. The seaweed circle symbolises hope that this will pass, naturally and with eco-friendly treatments implemented for the local ocean.

Opposite lower:

Rocio Monzon, *Delicate*, 2025

My project responds to the South Australian algal bloom by documenting altered coastlines, marine loss, and community impact. Through documentary and conceptual photography, I translate this environmental crisis into visual narratives that spark reflection on ecological fragility, climate driven change, and our relationship with the coast.









## **Abide with the Sea**

Abide with the sea  
Complete annihilation  
Decimation of hundreds of species  
Due to the harmful toxic algae  
Ecocide on every tide  
Observe. Do the maths, equate, calculate  
Hundreds, thousands, millions, trillions only a fraction of mortalities make it to the shores  
The macro and the micro, the intra and the inter woven together will reveal the unfolding  
story that needs to be told and remove the fairy tale narrative that the dominant regime  
holds.  
*Ecocide on every tide*  
*Suffocating killing our sea sons and daughters*  
*Abide with the sea*

Murky toxic water  
Suffocating killing our sea sons and daughters  
Karenia and Toxins known some-to-little -to- none  
Causing underwater mass hysteria,  
Suffocating fish, on the shores whole bodies pulsating, gasping to catch their dying breath  
Pain in their bodies, their mouths and eyes  
When I look too closely, I start to lose my breath, gasp and tears well, I cry.  
Every day every night  
Marine life succumbed to the fight  
Helpless, sadness, overwhelmed, angry, despairing,  
No where to swim  
No where to hide  
*Ecocide on every tide*  
*Suffocating killing our sea sons and daughters*  
*Abide with the sea*



As silver gull lies stranded blazing afternoon sun  
 Paralysed flapping  
 Unable to walk  
 Unable to fly  
 Its flock gather round  
 Silver gull about to die  
 Toxic harmful algal  
 On every front  
 In the sea  
 On the land  
 On the shores  
 And the air  
 Algae and toxins don't discriminate or care  
 Whether you have gills, nose, lungs,  
 Player, swimmer, fish beware  
 Phlegm, burning, swollen lips  
 Safe, temporary, use your inhaler  
 'Cause the air is getting staler  
 Close your windows and your doors

The stench, the murky the green and the brown  
 When we don't act now then we continue to drown

Temporary or long term  
 What's it to be?  
 Your turn to take a chance on the sea  
 What's good for one is not good for another  
 Look out, take care for he, she, they, their, that's your sister or brother  
 Sit on your hands wait for it to pass  
 "She'll be right" the bloom's not made to last

In-action, contradiction won't save the sea  
 Address climate change marine resiliency  
 Recovery, restoration, precautions and cautions to clear our waters  
 Protect our sea sons and daughters  
 Storm water's no place to send untreated waste into our seas  
 Contaminated, nitrated food for algae  
 The sea, the ocean is one of our own  
 Abide with the sea  
 Love, care, acts of compassion, humility  
 Restore the balance, seabeds, grasses, marine ecology  
*Ecocide on every tide*  
*Suffocating killing our sea sons and daughters*  
*Abide with the sea*

- Johanna Williams

Opposite and left written word:  
 Johanna Williams, *Abide with the Sea*, 2025

I live at Glenelg, where the harmful algal bloom first confronted me in July with thousands of unfamiliar fish washed ashore. Shock turned to action: I began daily documentation on iNaturalist, collected rare species for researchers, and shared my witness through media interviews. My poem reflects grief, contradictions, and the urgency to restore marine life, transforming despair into dialogue and renewal.

Opposite top image:  
 Johanna Williams, *iNaturalist observation 325586959*, 2025

Photographed at Glenelg Beach, this Rough Rock Crab (iNaturalist 325586959 ) reflects the toll of the harmful algal bloom and a coastline in distress. Through thousands of citizen science records, I honour these silent losses as evidence and memory in our shared search for understanding, healing, and responsibility.



## The Covid-Karenia Chronicles

We'd heard there was a virus, a microscopic killer, which was causing severe illness in a little-known place called Wuhan. And then it started spreading tentacles to all corners of the globe. Within months, the world had come to a standstill with travel shutdowns, overwhelmed healthcare systems, unprecedented social restrictions, and the race to develop a vaccine.

We'd heard there was a mysterious issue with surfers on our South Coast. People developed irritated eyes, and transient breathing difficulties. Alongside, there were huge numbers of dead fish and unprecedented seas of discoloured foam. It wasn't long before the culprit, yet another microscopic killer, *Karenia Mikimotoi*, a warm-water loving phytoplankton, spread its tentacles to Kangaroo Island followed by Adelaide's metropolitan beaches.

Suddenly this toxic algal bloom was real, enveloping almost five-thousand square kilometers. Marine creatures were washing up in unimaginable numbers. The science was confusing. The advent of winter along with colder waters, should fix the problem according to the scientists and politicians. Instead, everything became incalculably worse.

We would need to wait several more months to find out why.



Top: Mark Pix, *Snakes*, 2025  
Snakes at sunset, ironic that an environmental disaster can be so photogenic.



Both Covid and Karenia bestowed upon us a surreal type of disbelief initially. We became afraid to check the news in the mornings. Our lives felt irretrievably changed. Our old normal was gone. We were adjusting to an ever-moving set of goalposts.

First, we were told that only old people or those with serious illnesses would be affected by this novel coronavirus. And then healthy young people started dying.

First, we were told that only creatures with gills (fish, crustaceans, molluscs) would be affected. Then mammals like dolphins and seals started dying. Later came the seabirds that had often been seen feasting on dead fish and crabs. Normally shy cormorants were observed lumbering around clumsily and staggering right up to humans before dying. Lovable little penguins and even terrestrial birds like galahs and black swans joined the ever-lengthening mortalities list.

Every morning during the peak of Covid, we woke to increasingly discombobulating news. The smallest of things had brought the biggest of things like jumbo jets and cruise ships to a grinding halt. Weddings could only have 4 guests including the celebrant. Blowing up balloons was pronounced illegal in Melbourne. Supposedly contaminated pizza boxes sent entire states into lockdown. Attend the football, observe social distancing and wear masks, but don't touch the ball. We were ordered to stay home. Victorian children were to be home-schooled by parents who concurrently worked from home. People in aged care including those with dementia, were amputated from their loved ones supposedly to keep them safe. Frontline health heroes were dying in droves. Makeshift mortuaries mushroomed in major cities like New York. Non-interventional specialists like psychiatrists were suddenly redeployed to put people onto life support after the coalface intensive care doctors and nurses had perished. When would a vaccine be found? Would we all die?

Every morning during the peak of Karenia, we took a similarly deep breath before reading the news. The smallest of phytoplanktons was bringing huge creatures like whales, even majestic sea-turtles to a grinding halt. Many dogs on beach walks developed frothing at the mouth, some died or had to be euthanised. Swathes of foam blanketed beaches, forming balls that blew like flotsam and jetsam through the air. People were struck down with asthma, and residents of beachside suburbs were advised to stay home and keep all their windows and doors closed. Thousands of baby bluefin leatherjackets were dying on the high tides at metro beaches several times weekly, despite sampling levels of Karenia cells becoming negligible. A partly paralysed seagull languished on a bed of dead seagrass in the hot sun. Despite all of this, government signs advised that the beach was safe and that eating seafood was safe. The same government who advised that only creatures with gills would be affected.

Not birds, mammals, or reptiles.

Armies of citizen scientists materialised, (numbering over 1200), patrolling beaches daily, uploading mass marine mortalities data to iNaturalist from the frontline. Many millions of fish deaths and billions of crustaceans/molluscs/bivalves were recorded from the tip of the iceberg, our shores. Divers could see nothing but underwater graveyards of dead creatures and their now destroyed habitats of seagrass and shellfish reefs. Colourful fish lay gasping on our shores, a staggering biodiversity of which we were blissfully unaware.

Until now.

*Continued overleaf*



Waves of Covid variants crashed through as fast as you could recite the Greek alphabet (alpha, beta, delta, omicron). Similarly, waves of other exotic sounding Karenia species crashed ashore, including the obscure but highly toxic new kid on the block, Karenia Cristata. This cold-water loving organism also produced a nasty neurotoxin called brevetoxin which could disseminate widely through the water and the air.

While we slowly became immune to Covid via natural and vaccine acquired resistance, we risked becoming immune to the horror of ongoing marine deaths in their millions.

When will our lives return to normal? Will things ever be the same? What is normal? Could we ever cure Karenia? How will we address the causes like climate change induced marine heatwaves and nutrients flooding out of the Murray River system, if we can't even interest our Prime Minister in declaring this the national disaster that it is? Will we ever be able to swim in the sea again? When will it be safe to go out without a mask on? Will the decimated seafood industries and tourism bounce back? There's so much death and dying that we are getting desensitised. Not another gasping baby leatherjacket or spiky globefish, leaping from the lethal waters only to finish their lives suffocating at our feet? Is marine biodiversity a thing of the past? What will be left for our children and grandchildren to see? Are our oceans dying? Will we die?

As we contemplate our future generations, we look to David Attenborough for wisdom, "If we save the sea, we save our world." The corollary isn't worth thinking about.

Or is it?

**- Susan Belperio**







Opposite left and previous pages written word:

Susan Belperio, *The Covid-Karenia Chronicles*, 2025

A retired specialist anaesthetist and published photographer, I now work as a climate artist and citizen scientist harnessing the creative arts of writing and visual storytelling to document important stories, none so critical as our current toxic algal bloom. I use the intersectionality of these mediums to raise awareness within the community and with our policy makers, in the hope of effecting much needed wider intervention if we are to tackle this climate change related crises of our times.

Above:

Karoliina Kase, *Common Stargazer*, 2025

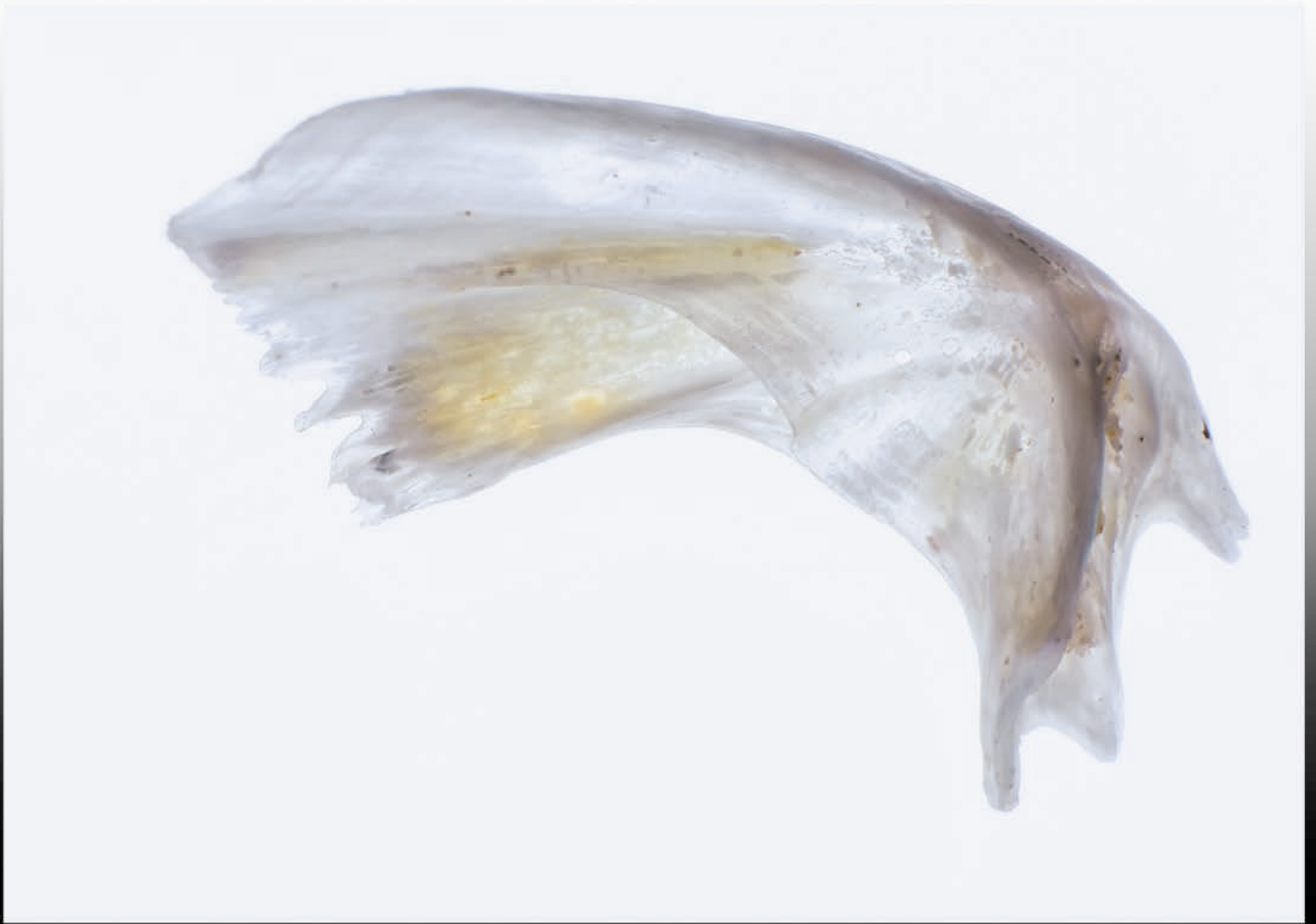
From the series *When the Sea Held its Breath*: Over the past months, I've created portraits of dead and dying sea life to humanize the crisis and document the scenes South Australian beachgoers have been witnessing over the past year. These images make the invisible suffering of marine creatures visible, shifting focus from statistics to the unique lives lost. The project invites viewers to confront this loss and reconsider their relationship with the ocean and its creatures.

Opposite left:

Scott Hedges, *Anthropocene 003*, 2025

Some days you'd find a huge amount of a particular species washed up and then the following day there are none to be seen. It's like the tide just gives you a quick snap shot of whats occurred as well as what the ocean floor must look like... \*\*I have spent a huge amount of time walking, observing and documenting the marine life washing up this year due to the HAB, please see my Instagram account 'scottyhedges' or iNaturalist account 'scotthedges' to get a better understanding of what I've been doing.









Above: Toni Hassan, *I didn't want to see you here*, 2025

The algal bloom was the sea talking. I wanted to talk back. As I walked along my local beach, encountering dead marine life, I made 'sand interventions' to recognise and memorialise the casualties. This is one of many Blue Weed Whiting.

Opposite top left: Marnya Rothe, *Bone From Bloom*, 2025

Marnya's portraits aims to explore our collective loss of connection to the natural world. In *Bone from Bloom*, Marnya replaces her human subjects with this found object discarded by the sea during the algal bloom. Her works are a memory of, and a bridge back to, the natural world.

Opposite lower left: Julie Thompson, *Sad Beach*, 2025

I have always loved nature, walking and photography, and was deeply saddened when I saw what was happening to our precious ocean life. I then heard about how members of the public could help with vital research by recording and uploading to inaturalist, effected ocean life from along our coastline.



## ***Sepia apama***

### *Giant Cuttlefish*

tender, sly and clever,  
you gather in the  
shallow breeding ground of the Gulf  
harvesting wan winter sun,  
warp and weft knitting, unravelling;  
a kilim of woven water-light.

Mimicking mollusc,  
you glide over sand, rock and weed,  
photocopy all that lies beneath  
as your changeling nerves ignite.

Flamenco ballerina,  
your hovercraft skirt ripples,  
electric valance a choreography  
of colour, chaos, cross-dress  
and posturing.

Giant cuttle,  
like a May-pole in Spring  
your rainbow tendrils tango,  
tap and test, test and tap the salt  
for a ripening mate.

Cephalopod coquette,  
you flirt in the sea's school yard  
in threesomes, foursomes,  
the 'U' of your pupil, seduction  
as you headlock and kiss  
above an old bottle  
spinning in the tide.

Harlequin strategist,  
you assemble a wordless  
parliament at question time,  
sliding forward, backward, sideways -  
four players then just one,  
politics of pairing.

Kaleidoscope cheat,  
you plot group grope games,  
a red butch male jostles a transvestite tart  
for her; the right to seed and die,  
spasm and spawn,  
primal law.

Aurora borealis,  
I float above the  
opal lozenges of your blushing bodies;  
me, — belly down, a fat, wet-suit seal.  
I slip my mitt through your bracelet of hugs,  
finger your pulsing skin,  
waltz in the silver disco ball of your eyes,  
and sway, sway, sway  
in your sepia swoon.

- **Maria Koukouvass (Vous)**







Above:

Samuel Kenworthy, *Dead Bodies Everywhere*, 2025  
Thousands of cuttlefish washed up dead near Tumby Bay.

Opposite top written word:

Maria Koukouvas (Vouis), *Sepia apama*, *Giant Cuttle*, 2025

*Sepia apama* revels in resilience of our Giant Cuttlefish. The spectacular spawning supports tourism for Whyalla. It illustrates the pulse in our oceans and eases collective solastalgia of our coastal communities. As a snorkeler, loss of my sanctuary is profound. Walking my dogs at Port Noarlunga shore is a daily witness of fish kill. Winner of the Satura Prize in 2021, it speaks directly to the Cuttles, the bliss of sea immersion. The survival of these cephalopods is a triumph.

Opposite lower:

Noah Amundson, *Photosynthesis*, 2025

Captured on 35mm film, seaweed is suspended in motion within the precious ocean. Often overlooked, it drifts silently as a quiet powerful presence working hard to regenerate marine environments and protecting ecosystems. As an ecological tool, it acts as a natural filter consuming excess nitrogen and phosphorus that fuel algal blooms.



## Solastalgia under Moonlight

i

Port Noarlunga August 2025

on the shore, we read the names of the dead,  
two hundred species are breathed  
over candles into the ruby dusk  
until the full moon cascades over  
a taxonomy of marine extinction

ii

a small choir sings and the polliwogs read their dead too,  
their faces cement from lag and letters unanswered.  
A girl, a blaze of magenta hair presses us to action,  
to serve with mobile phones and apps, digital resurrection

iii

Onkaparinga River, May 2025

the opalescent arc of a finished garfish,  
glitters in sunlight,  
my dog's paws dance over it,  
I snap it for iNaturalist – citizen science,  
I do my bit

iv

Port Noarlunga shore, July sometime...

a splinter-bright winter day,  
a still-life fish mosaic litters the lone shore,  
leather jackets, juveniles, mouths motionless  
still search for oxygen, turquoise lances  
like a final flag, next season's breeders

This and next page written word:  
Maria Koukouvas (Vouis), *Solastalgia Under Moonlight - Free Verse Poem - Diary*, 2025

As an addicted snorkeler on our Great Southern Reef, my free verse poems confess love, loss and refuge of the sea: it's personal, it's collective. As a published poet and teacher, this testimonio voices the need to bear witness to our exquisite marine life, its recovery and our own health.

Opposite top image:

Suzanne Phillips, *Sunset Fizz*, 2025  
An 'effervescent cocktail' from the coastal waters of Holdfast Bay.  
On this same evening in September, there was a person swimming in the sea nearby... as dead fish washed up onto the shore.

'[S]olastalgia' describes a negative emotion of missing or wanting, but not due to change in time or place, but due to a change in one's environment. It means the emotion that comes with missing one's "home" or place of comfort in setting of physical environment change, such as natural disaster, development, mining or climate change.

Avail: 17.08.25 <https://www.climatepsychiatry.org/major-topics-in-climate-psychiatry/solastalgia-missing-home-while-being-home>

v

Port Noarlunga Reef, January 2025

better than Nars that cult brand, your blushing pink gills,  
Rainbow cale, *Heteroscarus acroptilus*,  
fluorescent orange, *Fromia polypore*,  
you long-legged super model of the starfish world,  
moonlighter fish, *Tilodon sexfasciatus*, yellow food for my eye,  
I know more deeply now the hole you leave

vi

Port Noarlunga Reef, February 2023

split nerves of light in water,  
new-born fingerlings silvering,  
*Posidonia*, seagrass,  
choreography in slow current,  
my body bursts the skin of the sea,  
rockets from the layers of deep lapis  
through the surface jade,

vii

April late autumn, Easter, Second Valley

mask, fins and snorkel it was an easy slip  
through the sea's skin, suddenly beneath me  
a vast sea-meadow, grasses bloomed  
ombré of chartreuse, peridot, unnamed greens,  
the unseen hand of a gardener planted them,  
my breath is sharp





viii

above me you silently visit, barrel jelly fish,  
*Crambione mastigophoral*,  
the peristalsis of your bell-body flutters,  
autumn sun slants through your cupola with its crucifix cross,  
trails of tendrils with silver fishlettes take a free ride

ix

Port Noarlunga, October 2025

at night I revisit you all, over and over  
although I know your bodies are gone,  
the xylophone of your fish bones sings white songs,

no chronological order in grief, memories arrive and depart  
randomly as splattered ink stains,

but I can't forget

the wordless hovering of the ocean's water-glove,  
the daily friendship with reef fish who must stay and fade  
with the green plasma dream of *karenia mikimoioi*,  
*karenia christate*, *karenia*, *karenia*, *karenia*,

this too, will, may, pass.

Port Noarlunga, October 2025

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- Maria Koukouvas (Vouis)



## Ode to a Dying Friend

There is beauty in the dying  
A silent grace  
That flows across the skin  
As a song  
It's why I sit here with you  
Old friend  
In waking moments  
Watching every last breathe  
Waving in and out  
Gentle lapping in the wind  
Crashings in the storm  
Lashings on the shore  
Where fallows of fish lie  
Once held in schools  
That taught us green's supposed  
To be on hills, not in rock pools  
Not like this

There's calm in the cherishing  
I marvel your colours  
Ultramarine in the morning  
Cobalt blue of the blues with trickles of midnight  
A cerulean – cyan two tone snake  
Winding deep into dark navy distance  
Dark indigo sunset dusted with denim  
On the darkest violet days  
In brooding storms  
I walk beside you  
I mourn your children  
Once held in buoyance  
Washed upon silent shores  
With eyes that saw  
The true depths of your saltsoul  
You the one that once held us all

There's truth in the grieving  
One that must be spoken  
I'll bury them  
I'll stand at the rallies  
Make them numbers to count  
With the old ones  
Conserving observing preserving  
The warriors that fought  
Tidal waves of indifference  
The creatures come one by one  
Beached one day then the next  
We picture, post, and paint poetic flights  
They do not capture essence of what was  
What could be still, if only

There is hope in the holding  
The waiting  
Sunlit sparks waterskim  
Refracted refrain  
In these strange, eerie days  
Birds dip as they've always done  
Sandstone grinds slow  
All the colours change  
I wish I could paint them all  
The white splash  
A big body breaks in the air  
A whale and her calf  
She ascends so high  
With songs of the ancestors  
She will repair you know  
There'll be a new song  
They'll sing of us  
We who once were  
In the foam of your memory

- Anna Ray

Above written word:  
Anna Ray, *Ode to a Dying Friend*, 2025

Opposite top image:  
Susan Belperio, *Memento Mori*, 2025

This mysterious cross reigned transiently at Glenelg during the height of our HAB. A haunting tribute, it spoke louder than words, representing mass marine mortalities, raising community awareness, and symbolising hope through the endless cycle of tides and toxic foam buildup around its base. And then it was gone.





### Whisper to a roar

I saw them on the beach  
and the sea whispered  
help.

Along the shore, the sea murmured some more  
help us....

To the breakwater, and the sea ROARED

HELP US NOW!

So, the tide went out,  
and in,  
and out.

Many times.

Until we ROARED back

YES, YES, YES, we will!

And we did,

a bit late, a bit slow, not knowing.

HOW?

But we counted, we claimed, we were astonished at the  
variety, depth of detail, and the horror.

And the diversity and the strength and the beauty.

And we keep on. Looking. To the future. To the restoration.

- Carrie Taylor

### Left written word:

Carrie Taylor, *Whisper to a roar*, 2025

Many of us observed the growing numbers of fish and other creatures on the beaches, feeling helpless and sad. The opportunity to become citizen scientists has given people the sense of collective contribution to help the situation where they could.

### Back cover:

Mel Bakewell, *Gathered*, 2025

In December 2025, community members gather at the Port Willunga esplanade carpark at dusk. Someone is handing out paper printed with the names of sea kin impacted by the algal bloom. The names are read aloud and go on and on and on.

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Port Noarlunga

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