Helping local government
build stronger communities.

Adelaide Coastal Councils Network

2025-26 Annual Report

November 2026

lga South Australia

ACCN Adelaide Coastal Councils Network

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Chair's Report

The 2025/26 year has demonstrated the value of Adelaide's coastal councils working together to tackle shared challenges and create opportunities for our coastline and communities.

One of ACCN's greatest strengths is its ability to bring people together. Through collaboration, shared learning and collective advocacy, we have continued to strengthen relationships between councils, government agencies and other partners, building the foundations for more coordinated and effective coastal management.

This year also demonstrated the importance of those relationships when unexpected challenges arise. The harmful algal bloom affecting South Australia's coastline presented an unprecedented challenge for our coastal environment, communities and industries. ACCN responded quickly, bringing metropolitan councils together, sharing information and working closely with LGA South Australia and the South Australian Coastal Councils Alliance (SACCA) to advocate for a coordinated government response.

I would particularly like to acknowledge former ACCN Chair, Cr Gretel Wilkes (City of Onkaparinga), whose tireless leadership and advocacy during the harmful algal bloom response helped ensure the voices of metropolitan coastal councils were heard at the highest levels of government.

One of the most valuable lessons from this experience is that having a strong strategic direction doesn't mean being rigid. Our established relationships, shared expertise and collaborative approach enabled us to respond effectively to an unexpected crisis while continuing to advance our longer-term priorities. This flexibility has been critical to ACCN's effectiveness.

As we reach the end of our 2024–2026 Strategic Plan, there is much to celebrate. The Plan placed a strong emphasis on climate adaptation and resilience, and ACCN has made significant progress towards these goals. In particular, the SA Climate Ready Coasts Program (CRC), which ACCN helped conceive and champion, has grown into an effective statewide program, strengthening the knowledge, tools, funding and partnerships available to councils preparing for a changing coastline.

This is a significant achievement that will deliver lasting benefits. With CRC now well established, we have an opportunity to broaden our focus to other priorities affecting Adelaide's coastline and coastal communities, while ensuring the program's long-term success.

Looking ahead, the development of our next Strategic Plan provides an opportunity to reflect on these achievements, build on what we have learned and consider where ACCN can make the greatest contribution. Our experience this year has reinforced the importance of both long-

term strategic leadership and the capacity to respond collectively when new challenges emerge.

As Interim Chair, I have been encouraged by the commitment, expertise and generosity of the people involved in ACCN. I sincerely thank our member councils, elected member and technical officer representatives, partner organisations, LGA South Australia and the ACCN Executive Officer for their contributions throughout the year.

It is this spirit of collaboration, and our shared commitment to Adelaide's coastline, that makes ACCN such a valuable network.

Cr John Smedley
Interim Chair
Adelaide Coastal Councils Network
Councillor, City of Holdfast Bay

1. About ACCN

The Adelaide Coastal Councils Network (ACCN) brings together seven metropolitan coastal councils and LGA South Australia to advance the sustainable management of one of the State's most valued assets, its coastline.

ACCN provides a forum for collaboration between member councils and with state government agencies and other key partners, facilitating knowledge sharing, joint projects and coordinated advocacy to address shared coastal challenges and opportunities.

By working together at a regional scale, member councils can share resources and expertise, reduce duplication, improve efficiency and strengthen their collective ability to influence policy, secure investment, respond to emerging issues and deliver consistent, evidence-based approaches to coastal management.

Through this collective approach, ACCN works to achieve proactive, integrated and sustainable coastal management for the benefit of South Australia's communities, environment and economy, now and into the future.

Guided by its 2024–2026 Strategic Plan, Operational Plan and Communications and Engagement Plan, ACCN's formal partnership with LGA supports effective governance and aligned advocacy. A dedicated Executive Officer coordinates the Network's activities and supports the implementation of its strategic priorities.



2. Key achievements

ACCN's achievements during 2025/26 reflect the value of metropolitan coastal councils working collectively to address shared challenges. Through strategic partnerships, coordinated advocacy and knowledge sharing, the Network helped strengthen coastal management capability, advance regional initiatives and respond to emerging issues. The following sections highlight the key achievements and contributions made throughout the year.

Key achievements include:

- **A coordinated metropolitan council voice during the harmful algal bloom**, including state and federal advocacy.
- **Continued leadership and support for Climate Ready Coasts** and coastal hazard adaptation planning.
- **Strengthened partnerships** with LGA, Climate Ready Coasts, SA Coastal Councils Alliance (SACCA), Australian Coastal Councils Association, state agencies and other key stakeholders.
- **Supported regional collaboration** on major coastal initiatives, including the Adelaide Metropolitan Beach System and Port River/Barker Inlet Coastal Hazard Adaptation Plans.
- **Supported knowledge-sharing and professional development opportunities** through forums, webinars, Communities of Practice and practitioner events.
- **Helped shape LGA's 2026 State Election Priorities**, helping elevate coastal management, adaptation and resilience issues within local government advocacy.
- **Supported successful advocacy for a state Local Government Coastal Adaptation Coordinator** at the Department for Environment and Water (DEW), strengthening local government capacity to respond to coastal challenges.
- **12 committee meetings** during 2025/26: four Full Committee, three Executive Committee and five Technical Officer meetings.
- **12 monthly e-newsletters**, complemented by targeted updates and cross-agency information sharing.

Harmful algal bloom

The harmful algal bloom (HAB) was the defining emerging issue of 2025/26, requiring a rapid and coordinated response across coastal councils, government agencies and affected communities.

ACCN played a significant role in coordinating the metropolitan local government response and advocating for stronger State and Federal Government action. Working closely with LGA and SACCA, ACCN helped ensure the experiences, concerns and priorities of metropolitan coastal councils were represented in government decision-making.

Coordination and representation

ACCN helped establish regular communication and coordination arrangements to connect coastal councils with the broader government response. Weekly liaison meetings involving ACCN and SACCA Technical Officers, Executive Officers and the ACCN Chair provided a direct communication channel between councils and the State Government's Algal Bloom Stakeholder Reference Group. Separate weekly coordination meetings between ACCN, SACCA and LGA helped align advocacy, communications and engagement with government.

ACCN's representation and advocacy included:

- **Federal Government engagement:** The ACCN Chair attended Minister Murray Watt's Algal Bloom Roundtable and participated in the October 2025 delegation of coastal mayors and elected members to Canberra to advocate for a stronger national response.
- **State Government engagement:** The Chair represented ACCN on the Algal Bloom Stakeholder Reference Group. The Chair and Executive Officer, together with LGA South Australia's Manager Emergency Support, also engaged directly with the Department of the Premier and Cabinet's Algal Bloom Coordination Unit and the Beach Remediation Incident Management Team.
- **Parliamentary inquiries:** ACCN worked with LGA and SACCA to prepare joint submissions to the Federal Senate Inquiry into Algal Blooms in South Australia and the South Australian Joint Parliamentary Committee on Harmful Algal Blooms. The Chair also represented ACCN at associated public hearings.

Advocacy priorities

Through these forums and submissions, ACCN advocated for a coordinated, evidence-based response that addressed both the immediate impacts of the bloom and the longer-term resilience of coastal environments, communities and industries.

The October 2025 Canberra delegation called on the Federal Government to recognise the algal bloom as a national disaster requiring federal coordination and to provide funding for:

- **A Community Wellbeing and Resilience Framework** to support social and mental health outcomes in communities affected by harmful algal blooms and other large-scale marine mortality events.
- **Permanent coastal and marine biological and ecological monitoring**, including baseline data collection to improve understanding of marine ecosystem health and emerging threats.
- **A National Coastal and Marine Resilience Fund** to support local governments in responding to current and future marine environmental emergencies.

More broadly, ACCN advocated for transparent and timely environmental data, clear science-based public communications, regular briefings for local government, and practical arrangements for beach monitoring, clean-up, reporting and reimbursement.

Advocacy also highlighted the need for financial assistance to affected councils, coastal businesses and communities; expanded water quality testing and citizen science; long-term ecological monitoring; and investment in oyster reef and seagrass restoration to strengthen marine ecosystem resilience.

Outcomes and influence

Through its collaboration with LGA and SACCA, ACCN contributed to sustained advocacy that helped shape the government response and secure greater recognition of the needs of coastal councils and communities.

Important developments during the response included:

- **Information and coordination:** Improved access to timely information about the bloom, science-based public communications and regular local government briefings for elected members and council staff.
- **Beach management:** More coordinated and pragmatic arrangements for beach monitoring, clean-up, reporting and reimbursement.
- **Financial and community support:** Funding initiatives addressing council response and recovery, impacts on small businesses and coastal visitation, community wellbeing and mental health, and citizen science.
- **Environmental monitoring and restoration:** Investment in expanded water quality testing, longer-term coastal and marine ecological monitoring, and oyster reef and seagrass restoration.
- **Emergency management arrangements:** Amendments to the State Emergency Management Plan to strengthen arrangements for responding to marine emergencies, including identification of a lead agency and supporting coordination structures.

- **Recognition of marine environmental disasters:** Federal recognition of large-scale marine mortality events associated with harmful algal blooms and marine heatwaves, including the introduction of a Marine Recovery Loan through the Regional Investment Corporation to assist wild-catch fishers and aquaculture businesses affected by significant, slow-onset ecological events.

While these developments resulted from the collective efforts of governments, councils, industry and community stakeholders, ACCN's sustained representation helped ensure that local government priorities remained visible throughout the response.

The harmful algal bloom was not anticipated in ACCN's Strategic Plan, yet it became a major focus during the year. The response demonstrated the Network's ability to mobilise quickly, draw on established partnerships and provide coordinated leadership during a complex environmental emergency, while continuing to advance its longer-term strategic priorities.

Climate Ready Coasts

A significant achievement for ACCN has been its leadership and support of the award-winning SA Climate Ready Coasts (CRC) program.

ACCN played an important early role in championing the concept of a coordinated statewide coastal adaptation program and continued to provide leadership throughout the implementation phase through representation on governance and management groups, strategic input into program development, review of technical guidance materials, and ongoing engagement with program partners.

Through CRC, member councils have gained access to improved coastal hazard information, adaptation planning tools, funding opportunities, professional development and regional collaboration initiatives. ACCN supported, guided and promoted CRC Communities of Practice, webinars, training opportunities and Coastal Hazard Adaptation Planning (CHAP) projects (e.g. the Adelaide Metropolitan Beaches and Port River and Barker Inlet CHAP projects), helping to build adaptation capability across metropolitan Adelaide and South Australia more broadly.

Advocacy and influence

Representing the collective interests of Adelaide's metropolitan coastal councils remained a core function of ACCN during 2025/26. Through its partnership with LGA, ACCN brought specialist coastal knowledge and a coordinated regional perspective to government policy, funding priorities and decisions affecting Adelaide's coastline.

Key advocacy activities and achievements included:

- **State Election advocacy and funding:** Through helping to shape LGA's 2026 State Election Priorities, ACCN advocated for increased Coast Protection Grant funding, greater investment in disaster mitigation and dedicated state support for coastal adaptation planning.
- **Government engagement:** Seeking opportunities to engage with the Minister for Climate, Environment and Water and the Coast Protection Board on strategic priorities, coastal research, funding arrangements and opportunities for greater collaboration.
- **State and national advocacy:** Providing specialist coastal input into LGA South Australia briefings, government discussions and submissions, including engagement with the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) on federal policy and funding priorities.
- **Harmful algal bloom response:** Working with LGA and SACCA to coordinate advocacy to State and Federal governments, including parliamentary submissions, ministerial engagement and participation in key response forums.

By combining ACCN's regional knowledge, expertise and relationships with LGA's broader advocacy reach, the partnership strengthened the visibility of metropolitan coastal issues, built relationships with decision-makers and reinforced the importance of sustained investment in coastal management, adaptation and resilience.

Collaboration, Knowledge Sharing and Capacity Building

Partnerships and collaboration are central to ACCN's success. Throughout 2025/26, ACCN continued to strengthen relationships between member councils, government agencies and other key partners, bringing together knowledge, expertise and resources to address shared challenges, build collective capacity, reduce duplication and deliver outcomes that would be difficult for individual councils to achieve alone.

The active participation of government agencies and partner organisations in ACCN Committee and Technical Officer meetings was highly valued by participants. Regular updates, presentations and roundtable discussions provided a trusted forum for sharing knowledge, identifying emerging issues and exploring opportunities for collaboration. These established relationships and regular opportunities for communication helped councils and partners anticipate challenges, coordinate responses and make effective use of limited resources.

A close working relationship with SACCA supported collaboration on matters of statewide significance, including coastal adaptation, joint advocacy and shared funding opportunities.

ACCN was proud to sponsor the SACCA Coastal Forum and partner on strategic projects addressing climate-resilient infrastructure and managed coastal retreat.

Knowledge sharing and professional development extended beyond ACCN meetings through training opportunities and regular communications. Monthly e-newsletters and regular email updates kept coastal practitioners informed of emerging issues, research, projects and developments in coastal planning and management.

3. Progress against strategic priorities

ACCN's 2024–2026 Strategic Plan sets out a shared vision for a resilient, sustainable and thriving Adelaide coastline. It identifies four interconnected priorities that guide the Network's collective efforts to address coastal challenges, strengthen resilience and support the communities and environments that depend on our coast.

The following section highlights progress made during 2025/26 against these four priorities:

- **Climate ready** – member councils have the evidence, skills, resources, and capability to adapt to coastal change.
- **Resilient and sustainable coastal infrastructure and built environments** – coastal infrastructure and built environments are climate resilient and sustainable over the long term.
- **Flourishing catchments and coastal ecosystems** – catchment and coastal ecosystems are ecologically healthy, and resilient to a changing climate and future conditions.
- **Thriving coastal communities** – Adelaide's coastal communities thrive into the future.

Climate ready

Climate Ready Coasts, which ACCN played a key role in championing and establishing, continued to develop as a major statewide initiative during 2025/26. This represented significant progress towards strengthening the capacity of metropolitan coastal councils and laying the foundations for a more coordinated, consistent and evidence-based approach to coastal adaptation across South Australia.

ACCN continued to provide strategic leadership and technical input into the program, helping ensure metropolitan council needs and perspectives informed its delivery. This included contributing to program governance, reviewing guidance materials and supporting knowledge sharing and professional development such as the CRC Coastal Resilience Short Course, delivered by Griffith University in partnership with the Coast Protection Board and LGA.

The Adelaide Metropolitan Beaches and Port River and Barker Inlet CHAP projects represented another significant step forward, bringing councils and government agencies together to undertake coordinated coastal hazard assessment and adaptation planning at a regional scale, pooling expertise, resources and investment. ACCN supported both projects through steering arrangements and collaboration with participating councils and agencies.

ACCN also partnered with URPS and SACCA on the Local Government Research and Development Scheme-funded *Options for Managed Coastal Retreat Project*. ACCN supported the

development of the project, participated in the working group and provided strategic and technical input. The project is helping to build a shared understanding of the opportunities, challenges and policy considerations associated with managed retreat as a potential coastal adaptation response.

In addition, ACCN collaborated with partners on two funding applications to expand CoastSnap coastal monitoring across South Australia. Although the application was unsuccessful, it helped build the case for investment in consistent coastal monitoring and strengthened collaboration between councils and partner organisations. Several member councils have now invested in CoastSnap installations, contributing to a growing evidence base to inform coastal management and adaptation planning across metropolitan Adelaide.

Alongside this work, ACCN continued to advocate for increased investment in coastal adaptation and helped connect member councils with emerging research, technical guidance, professional development and funding opportunities.

A significant achievement was the successful advocacy for a State Government-funded Local Government Coastal Adaptation Coordinator based within DEW. This role is helping to build local government capability, facilitate knowledge sharing and strengthen coordination between councils and state government as coastal adaptation planning progresses.

Resilient and sustainable coastal infrastructure and built environments

Strengthening the resilience of coastal infrastructure remained an important focus for ACCN during 2025/26. A key achievement was ACCN's contribution to the *Institute of Public Works Engineering Australasia (IPWEA) Climate Resilient Infrastructure Guidelines Project*, funded through the Australian Government's Disaster Ready Fund. ACCN partnered in the project, helping guide its development through participation on the Steering Committee and providing feedback on the draft guidelines. The resulting guidance will help councils and asset managers better understand and manage climate risks to infrastructure, supporting more informed investment and asset management decisions.

Regular information-sharing and roundtable discussions at ACCN Committee meetings also provided opportunities for councils to engage directly with DEW, Department for Infrastructure and Transport (DIT) and other government agencies on coastal projects and infrastructure issues. These included updates on the Adelaide Beach Management Review and associated dredging trial, helping councils stay informed of developments affecting coastal management, infrastructure and public assets, and providing opportunities to raise local issues and share perspectives.

ACCN also collaborated with SACCA to survey coastal councils about the impacts of three major storm events during winter 2025, helping build a shared understanding of emerging coastal risks and management challenges.

The proposed metropolitan coastal infrastructure baseline audit was placed on hold pending the outcomes of the CHAP projects. These projects are expected to provide valuable information about future coastal risks, adaptation options, infrastructure requirements and associated costs. Once available, this information could form the basis of a metropolitan-scale assessment to inform future infrastructure investment priorities, strategic planning and coordinated advocacy.

Flourishing catchments and coastal ecosystems

ACCN's most significant contribution to this strategic priority during 2025/26 was its coordination and advocacy in response to the harmful algal bloom affecting South Australia's coastline.

Working closely with LGA and SACCA, ACCN advocated for stronger protection and monitoring of coastal and marine environments, including permanent biological and ecological monitoring, improved baseline data collection and expanded water quality testing.

Advocacy also highlighted the importance of citizen science and investment in oyster reef and seagrass restoration to strengthen marine ecosystem resilience. These priorities were reflected in ACCN's contributions to State and Federal Government discussions and parliamentary inquiries, helping ensure the long-term health of coastal and marine ecosystems remained a focus alongside the immediate emergency response.

ACCN also supported a Flinders University grant application to the Local Government Research and Development Scheme for a project to monitor microplastic pollution in urban waterways and develop a database of pollution loads. Although the application was unsuccessful, the proposed research highlighted opportunities to strengthen the evidence base for managing pollution impacts on coastal and marine ecosystems.

A draft of the updated Metropolitan and Northern Adelaide Coastal Action Plan (MANCAP) was presented to the ACCN Committee during 2025/26. However, the planned review of its priorities was deferred pending the Plan's completion and public release.

ACCN maintained its strong working relationship with Green Adelaide, which regularly participated in ACCN meetings to share updates on coastal and catchment management initiatives and explore opportunities for regional collaboration.

Thriving coastal communities

The harmful algal bloom became a major focus for ACCN under this strategic priority during 2025/26, highlighting the interconnected impacts of marine environmental emergencies on coastal communities, businesses and industries.

Working with LGA and SACCA, ACCN advocated for a coordinated government response that recognised the social and economic consequences of the bloom, alongside its environmental impacts.

A particular focus was the need for greater investment in community wellbeing and resilience. Through the October 2025 delegation to Canberra and other advocacy activities, ACCN called for a Community Wellbeing and Resilience Framework to support communities affected by harmful algal blooms and other large-scale marine mortality events. Advocacy also sought financial assistance for affected coastal businesses, support for community mental health and opportunities for community participation through citizen science.

Government responses included funding initiatives to support affected businesses and communities, as well as the introduction of a Federal Marine Recovery Loan to assist wild-catch fishers and aquaculture businesses affected by significant ecological events.

Alongside this response, ACCN undertook preliminary investigations into the economic and social benefits of Adelaide's metropolitan coastline, with a view to strengthening the evidence base for future planning, investment and advocacy. This work highlighted opportunities for future collaboration and will help inform the development of ACCN's next Strategic Plan.

4. Governance and financial sustainability

ACCN continued to operate through its Committee, Executive Committee and Technical Officer Working Group arrangements, supported by LGA and a dedicated Executive Officer.

A total of 12 committee meetings were held during 2025/26, comprising four full Committee meetings, three Executive Committee meetings and five Technical Officer meetings.

Following Cr Gretel Wilkes' resignation from the City of Onkaparinga in April 2026, Cr John Smedley assumed the role of Interim Chair. Arrangements for the appointment of ACCN office bearers will be reviewed following the April 2027 local government elections.

ACCN's seven member councils each contributed $10,000 in 2025/26, supplemented by accumulated funds and in-kind support from LGA. The Network maintained a healthy financial position, with a closing balance of $111,466, although annual membership contributions no longer fully cover operating costs.

A planned review of governance and membership arrangements during 2026/27 will provide an opportunity to consider the Network's long-term financial sustainability, including membership contributions and potential indexation.

5. Looking ahead

As ACCN approaches the conclusion of its 2024–2026 Strategic Plan, the Network has much to celebrate and a strong foundation for the future.

The current Strategic Plan has placed a strong emphasis on climate adaptation and resilience. Through its leadership, advocacy and ongoing contribution to CRC, ACCN has made significant progress towards these goals, helping establish a coordinated statewide approach to coastal adaptation and strengthening the capability of coastal councils.

With CRC now well established, ACCN has an opportunity to broaden its focus to other priorities affecting Adelaide's coastline and coastal communities, while continuing to support the program's long-term success.

The harmful algal bloom response has also provided valuable lessons for ACCN's future. It demonstrated the Network's capacity to respond quickly and effectively to emerging challenges, drawing on established relationships, specialist expertise and strong partnerships to coordinate action and advocate for coastal councils.

The development of ACCN's next Strategic Plan will provide an opportunity to reflect on these achievements, draw on lessons from the past year and work with member councils and key partners to determine where the Network can make the greatest contribution in the years ahead.

By continuing to work collaboratively, ACCN will remain a strong and influential voice for Adelaide's coastline and the communities that rely upon it.

6. Acknowledgements

The achievements of the ACCN are made possible by the commitment, expertise and generosity of the many people and organisations who contribute to its work.

We sincerely thank our seven member councils for their ongoing support and shared commitment to the sustainable management of Adelaide's coastline. In particular, we acknowledge the elected member representatives and Technical Officers who contribute their time, knowledge, experience and goodwill to the Network, strengthening collaboration across council boundaries.

ACCN member councils and representatives, 2025/26

Member council	Elected member	Technical Officer
City of Charles Sturt	Cr Kenzie van den Nieuwelaar	Kelly Mader
City of Holdfast Bay	Cr John Smedley (Interim Chair)	Alex Gaut
City of Marion	Cr Sarah Luscombe	Rebecca Neumann
City of Onkaparinga	Cr Geoff Eaton Cr Gretel Wilkes (until April 2026)	Tanya Roe
City of Port Adelaide Enfield	Cr Peter McGregor	Ann Gibbons
City of Salisbury	Cr Sharon McKell	Beth MacGillivray
City of West Torrens	Cr Sara Comrie	Nicky O'Broin

We extend our thanks to former ACCN Chair Cr Gretel Wilkes for her dedicated leadership and tireless advocacy, especially during the harmful algal bloom response, and to Cr John Smedley for stepping into the role of Interim Chair and providing continued leadership.

LGA South Australia

We warmly acknowledge the invaluable support and partnership of LGA, particularly:

- Alex Ward, ACCN Executive Officer
- Katherine Russell, Manager Policy Projects
- Mayor Moira Were, LGA Board Representative

Their dedication, expertise and ongoing support have been instrumental in enabling ACCN to operate effectively, strengthen partnerships and advance its strategic priorities.

Partners and stakeholders

We also sincerely thank the many government agencies, research institutions, community organisations and other partners who have generously shared their expertise and worked alongside ACCN throughout the year.

We acknowledge the ongoing contributions of the Australian Coastal Councils Association, Climate Ready Coasts, South Australian Coastal Councils Alliance, Department for Environment and Water, Department for Infrastructure and Transport, Green Adelaide and the Coast Protection Board.

The strength of ACCN lies in the relationships between the people and organisations who care for Adelaide's coastline. We are grateful for the generosity, collaboration and shared commitment that make this Network possible.

Helping local government build stronger communities.

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