

Launch sprint report



The Algal Bloom Shed
April 2026

www.algalbloomshed.com.au

It all started with Bloomin' Algae



Bloomin' Algae was established by a group of volunteers in the wake of the major harmful algal bloom (HAB) along South Australia's coast in 2025. What started as an algae problem quickly became a shared challenge — one that cuts across ecosystems, health, livelihoods and communities.

Within a week of us deciding to do a small pro bono disaster impact assessment on the HAB we had established a website about it to help us source the data we needed.

Within a day of that website going live, we had received calls from the press asking for interviews, and from leading researchers and professionals of all types—epidemiology, law, engineering, business strategy, art, microbiology, oceanography, and more—offering their time and expertise. It was nine months since the HAB had begun, and we did not anticipate the size of the gap we were stepping into, or the willingness of so many people to step into it with us.

Large organisations like governments and universities have been slow to act in this disaster, as evidence gaps, disciplinary silos, institutional inertia, limited past experiences, and lack of rapidly-available funding hampered action on an intensely undisciplined issue.

With a critical mass of volunteer experts willing to donate their time, we decided it was time to meet in-person and get some things done. This report details what we achieved during this launch sprint, held in Adelaide on 25–27 February 2026.



The event opened a whole can of worms! Well done and definitely keep going! There is obviously a need for more research, information collection and sharing, collaboration and cooperation needed before we're likely to get much in the way of resolution to the current problem or resilience to future outbreaks.

– Launch sprint attendee

700+

hours of expert volunteer time contributed

60

people attended the launch sprint over three days

4

Main initiatives progressed: Health, Education, Impact assessment, Shed



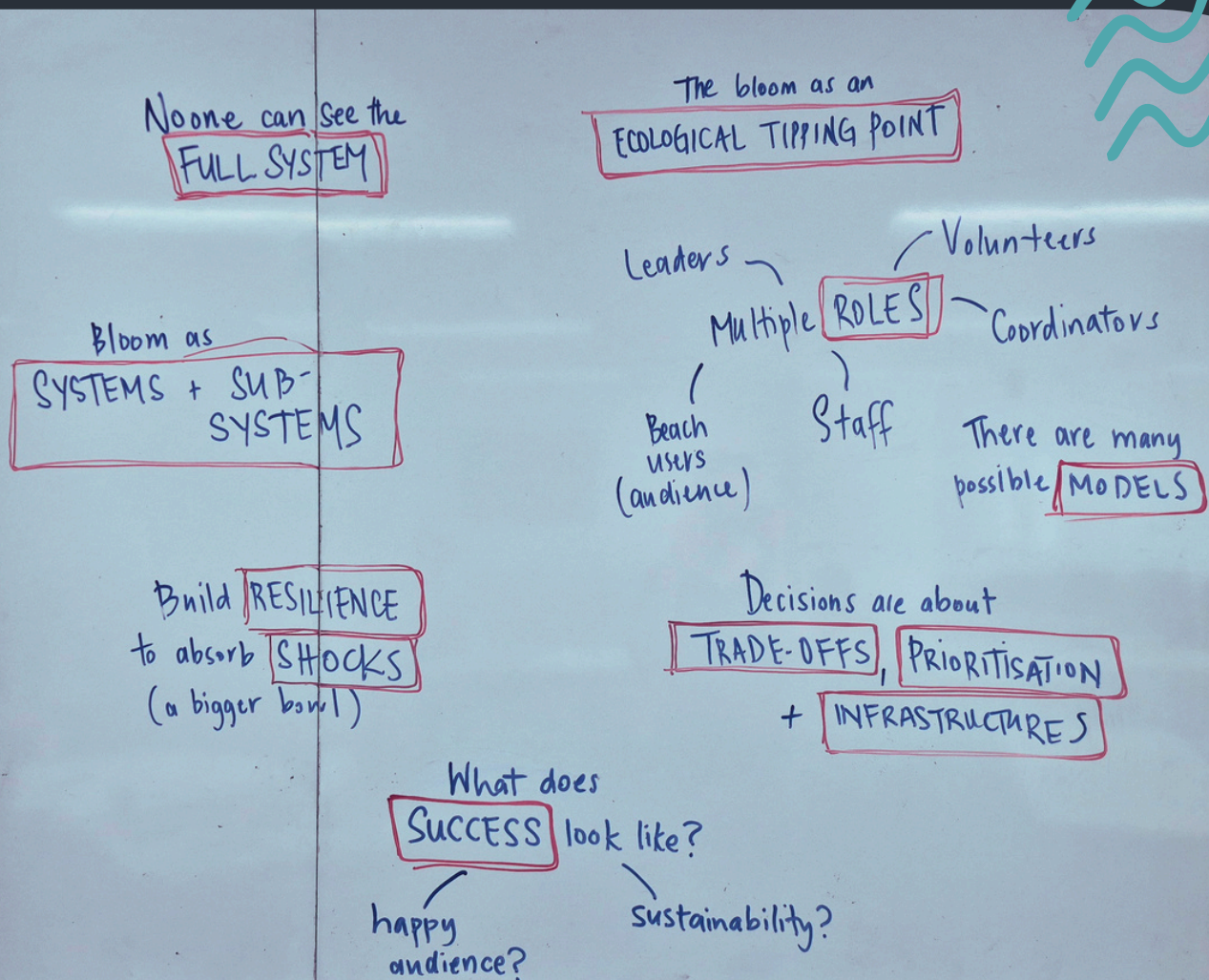
Collaborating in complex systems

How might we build a team quickly around a complex systemic disaster? A team based in South Australia, where we are known for our love of vibrant festivals...

We asked our friends at Boho Interactive.. and they brought their interactive systems thinking game *Best Festival Ever: How to manage a disaster* to help our volunteers rapidly build shared experience, concepts, language and community.

It was a purposefully different way into starting an expert collaboration, foregrounding play, interaction and seeing how we worked together, rather than words, presentations, and defining ourselves by our disciplines.

Even more than that. The systems concepts explained during the game also apply to the SA HAB. Over eight in ten participants told us that with the right introduction and review, *Best Festival Ever* would help South Aussies understand more about the HAB (perhaps we need to bring it to the Fringe in 2027!). And 100% thought we should partner with Boho Interactive to develop a bespoke offering specific to HABs.



Focus #1

Impact assessment



We initially built *Bloomin' Algae* with the aim of carrying out a disaster impact assessment – something we've done before in other contexts and nations. We're focusing first on business, tourism and fisheries.

Creating an impact model for the SA HAB requires many different skills, datasets and perspectives as we debate assumptions, parameters and framing the numbers.

Our in-person sprint gave us time and space to build a team around the impact assessment and get creative about where to find the data. We designed and tested a business impact survey, and using last data from last year, we developed a draft model.

Our next steps are to connect with Local Councils to source up-to-date data and test early findings with stakeholders in a peer review process.

Here's what we achieved

Business impact survey

To collect more data, we designed a Business Impact Survey. Once testing is complete, we'll be asking coastal businesses to complete it.

Draft model developed

Using data from a broad range of sources we identified during our sprint, we put together a draft model. Now all we need is updated data.

Framing our findings

Modelling is only half the challenge. Framing our findings so they can be used by governments, businesses and communities is equally important, and the team began doing just that.

Impact assessment lead

Prof. James Daniell
John Monash Scholar
Karlsruhe Institute of Technology
Adelaide University





Focus #2

Health

When we built the *Bloomin' Algae* website, public reports and fears around health were playing out in social media and the press. We started collecting data.

Nine months after the start of the bloom, we established what continues to be the only coastal HAB health symptom reporting portal in Australia.

It is, to our knowledge, one of the first portals globally that captures data on pet health as well as human health.

Our in-person sprint gave us time and space to collectively analyse and release the first tranche of data collected via our portal.

We also laid the foundations (including relationships, communication tools, community networks, and contextual understanding) to apply for a Wellcome Climate Impact Award. With this we aim to bring over \$4m in funding to SA to study the health and economic impacts of the HAB, and build what's needed to prepare for future surges.

Here's what we achieved

Data collection portal

We decided to continue to operate a human and pet health reporting portal on our website. We will look to improve and expand the portal in collaboration with SA Health moving forward.

Data release

We provided data and information to ABC's Four Corners, and released the first tranche of data from our portal. Read the press release [here](#).

Major grant application

We built the relationships, community networks, contextual understanding and communication tools needed for Jacqueline Stephens (Flinders University) to lead a \$4m grant bid.

Health lead

A/Prof. Jacqueline Stephens
Flinders University



Focus #3

Education



When we built the *Bloomin' Algae* website, it was difficult to find clear, accessible explainers about key aspects of the HAB.

Given our team includes a scientific communicator, a high school science teacher and an award-winning SA filmmaker, we thought we could make some great public education.

Our in-person sprint gave us time to work together to create a vision and a plan. We interviewed team members, captured B-roll footage, and identified knowledge gaps through conversations with the group and attendees.

Citizen scientists who attended also generously agreed to be interviewed, and provided rich experiences and explanations. Our work has therefore expanded to also telling the story of the SA HAB and responses to it.

Here's what we achieved

Educational videos

We began creating incredible short videos to help members of the public spend less time exposed to conspiracy theories and more time discussing the science.

National awareness study

We completed reporting on a national survey about algal bloom awareness; while awaiting peer review, it is [now available on SocArxiv](#).

The story of the HAB

We started working on telling the story of the SA HAB – debating where to start, what to discuss, and how to tell it, with a view to informing future responses and resilience.

Education lead

Dr Marianne Haines
John Monash Scholar
Australian National University



What's needed?

The launch sprint also led us to iterate *Bloomin' Algae*.

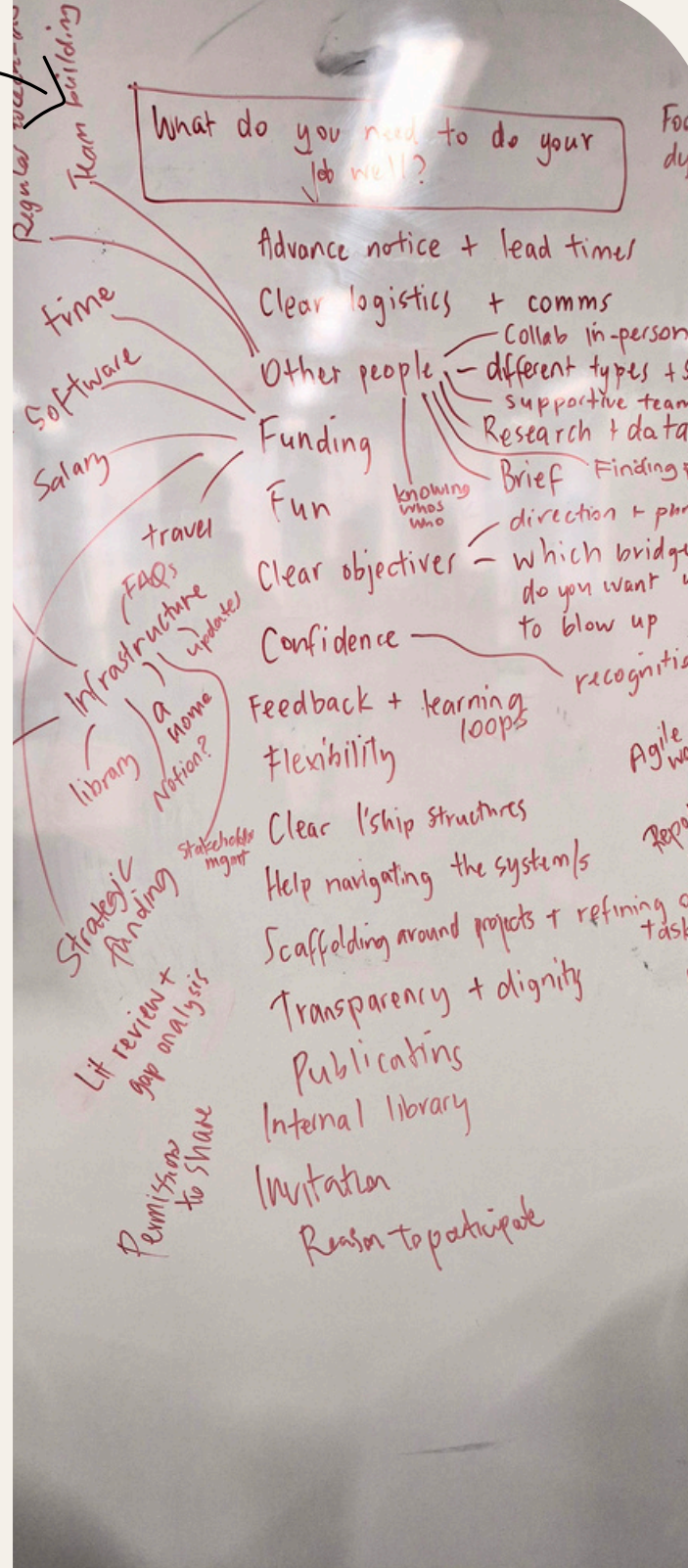
As a prototype it was great, giving us space to consider: Are we a collective? A platform? What already exists in SA? What is needed by the community?

Our community of volunteer experts was clear on what they needed to do their jobs well. Some of that list is pictured here.

Some of these things we can find through partner organisations, employers, friends, collaboration and more.

Some, we think we can create together. Things like scaffolding and space for collaboration, building each others' confidence, having fun, creating learning loops, flexibility for rapid adaptation, help navigating multiple systems, and a reason to get involved.

So, we decided to build a Shed.



What's a Shed?

Aussie sheds are all about resilience and mateship. They're practical spaces where people can be resourceful and inventive, share skills, contribute to their community, offer networking and provide support.

Mark Thomson, Institute of Backyard Studies

From Bloomin' Algae to an Algal Bloom Shed



The Algal Bloom Shed aims to harness collective intelligence around the SA HAB and its ripple effects to transform “lessons observed” into “lessons learned” for the future. We aim to prepare smarter responses to whatever rolls in next, and provide rapid uplift capability should the bloom surge again.

SHEDs — Spaces for Health, Ecosystems and Disasters — are collaborative community hubs set up in response to ecological tipping points. They are inspired by the sheds so central to Australian cultural life, being “practical spaces where people can be resourceful and inventive, share skills, contribute to their community, offer networking and provide support.”

SHEDs are important enablers of local capability, being a focal site for research, education and analytic skills, harbouring key surge capacity, and supporting community preparedness, resilience, response and recovery. They reflect the kind of new social infrastructure increasingly called for in Australia in response to disasters. They complement what governments and communities can do, and provide a flexible, adaptive, collaborative space and spirit.

Looking forward, *The Shed* aims to expand its role as a community hub, research innovation incubator, and custodian of disaster capability.



Who's in the shed

Some people pop in, others have moved in... the mix is adapting over time. Here are key people involved in the launch sprint outputs.



Amy McLennan
Medical anthropologist
John Monash Scholar



James Daniell
Global disaster risk analyst
John Monash Scholar



Jacqueline Stephens
Epidemiologist



Emily Ragus
Disaster and emergency response expert
John Monash Scholar



Marianne Haines
Microbiologist, biochemist,
science communicator
John Monash Scholar



Jess Coldrey
Global sustainability leader
John Monash Scholar



Sally Cook
Strategic climate advisor



Johannes Brand
Global environmental risk specialist



Katherine Daniell
Global water governance cooperation expert
John Monash Scholar



Enya Chitty
Coastal systems scientist



Will Richards
Nature and climate finance lawyer



Heidi Kenyon
Visual artist



Ben Mylius
Environmental political theorist
John Monash Scholar



Alies Sluiter
Filmmaker
John Monash Scholar



Andrew Meares
Photojournalist, comms specialist, cyberneticist



Ariella Helfgott
Futures and foresight strategist

We'd like to thank our community for their generous support



The General Sir John Monash Foundation Leadership Academy for a Collaborative Grant to cover travel and involvement of so many Australian John Monash Scholars

The Australian National University School of Cybernetics for seed funding to support event participation and delivery

Flinders University for gifting us an amazing space in Festival Tower, and to Jayne, Tania, Kirsten and Dave for ensuring everything ran smoothly

Brighton Jetty Bakery for the incredible donuts

Community members for offering homestays for non-SA team members

Citizen scientists and Shed advisors for all they've done around the HAB so far, and for coming and gifting us their time, feedback and expertise

The people in the Shed for bringing collaborative spirit and thousands of dollars worth of volunteer time and expertise

