



6th July, 2026

SUBMISSION: AUKUS PUBLIC INQUIRY

Background

[Friends of Port River](#) (FPR), and its predecessor the [Estuary Care Foundation](#) (ECF), have been concerned about the fate of the Port River and Barker Inlet Estuary and advocating for its care for ten years. Our concerns have included the surrounding area and community, given

- The significant demands on land, the River and services, from industrial development especially the AUKUS development
- The Estuary is home to the [Adelaide Dolphin Sanctuary](#), is the southern end of the [Adelaide International Bird Sanctuary](#), is crucial as breeding grounds for prawns and fish, contributes carbon abatement via *blue carbon* and provides numerous other ecosystem services.
- The nature of the SA planning system which deals individually with each new project, without due regard for the cumulative impact.
- The well documented risks of sea level rise, storm surges and flooding commencing with the 2005 *Port Adelaide Seawater Stormwater Flooding Study*¹
- The low levels of stormwater protection on the Peninsula, including vulnerable areas east of Victoria Road opposite AdBri, and heavy reliance on pumping stormwater to the Port River, which could be more challenging as we experience more 'unprecedented' weather events
- The lack of open space in many areas of the Peninsula, which limits community amenity and the potential to divert stormwater
- State Government's urban infill strategy which seems to pay no regard to risks such as stormwater protection and exposure to AdBri's emissions, nor to the quality of life for new and existing residents. The most recent residential developments facilitated by Renewal SA around the Port River have very limited open space and almost no community facilities for thousands of new residents.

Current environmental harm

Over the last ten years ECF/FPR have witnessed significant environmental harm, and/or failure to minimise harm in the Estuary and Peninsula, by the SA Government including

- Poor regulation of the Dry Creek Saltfields and failure to prevent the operator pumping hypersaline brine into some cracked ponds, leading to the [loss](#) of over 24 hectares of

¹ *Port Adelaide Seawater Stormwater Flooding Study*, Tonkin Consulting and WBM Oceanics Australia, for City of Port Adelaide Enfield, October 2005, Ref No 20020477RA3D

vegetation (mangroves and saltmarsh) and with the catastrophic impact continuing unchecked.

- Failure to maintain the seawall at [Mutton Cove](#), (now situated within the AUKUS footprint), which led to the seawall failing in May 2016 and the banks progressively eroding. Mutton Cove abuts the northern end of the ASC, Mersey Road, and the southern end of the extended AUKUS development. Despite ANI, Flinders Ports, the City of Port Adelaide Enfield, and the Department of Environment, contributing \$20K each towards an analysis of coastal risks and identification of adaptation options, the 2021 report of that study has not been provided to the funding partners and the State Government has continued to allow the seawall and banks to fail.
- Failure to remove from the Peninsula, on both sides of the Port River, extensive areas of [Penrice waste](#), which the State Government allowed Penrice to dump on Government land prior to the company's liquidation in 2014.
- Failure to develop strategies to protect the community from harm from sea level rise, storm surges and flooding, despite numerous studies and apparently ongoing work, by the City of Port Adelaide Enfield and the Coast Protection Board.
- Loss of TEC saltmarsh and risks to wetlands at [Gillman](#) from a recent State Government development at Gillman. Compounding the risks Renewal SA has faulty tidal gates, that cannot be shut to limit high tide impacts from the Estuary to the wetlands, or impede stormwater discharges.
- Trucks will take spoil 24x7 from the Torrens to Darlington road works to Gillman from Q3, 2026 to 2031 and while this is currently impacting local roads there's been no known notice to local residents.

Contact with Commonwealth and State agencies

About eight years ago ANI reached out to Port Adelaide Residents Environment Protection Group (PAREPG) and FPR, as part of their efforts to secure their social licence in the community, and we met regularly with them around their infrastructure plans, the future of Mutton Cove etc.

From December 2023, we met with ASA representatives and from May 2024 those meetings became monthly with ANI and ASA reps.

In February 2025, representatives of the Office of AUKUS, Department of Premier and Cabinet joined the meetings, and we were advised of State Government planned to develop a Lefevre Masterplan, with consultants engaged to develop the Plan. So that the community could be consulted we arranged for the consultants to address a Port Adelaide Environment Forum meeting and feedback was submitted from the Forum to the DP&C. We understood that the draft Lefevre Masterplan would be presented at another Forum meeting this year, but that has now been superseded by the Osborne State Development Area process (see below).

Some of the key themes that were raised at the Forum consultation included:

- Locals' aspirations for the Peninsula including holistic approach, greening, restoration of and access to the River, fostering social connections

- Opposition to AUKUS and/or reservations about its impact on our community
- Negative impacts already on environment and community including Harmful Algal Bloom, poor canopy cover, AdBri and traffic emissions,
- How the local community might benefit since for example only a small proportion of residents (17.2%) both live and work² locally
- Lack of infrastructure including water, stormwater, electricity
- Major problems currently with transport and lack of infrastructure to deal with the proposed workforce growth and other demands
- Suggestions for social infrastructure and housing developments
- Suggestions for environmental improvements including protection of Biodiversity Park and implementation of the ECF [Vision for the Estuary](#).

Assessment of the AUKUS development

The Friends of Port River was able to directly compare the application of Commonwealth and State development assessment processes when ANI submitted an EIS to the State Government for the AUKUS development and ASA provided a Strategic Impact Assessment Report (SIAR) to the Commonwealth Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW). (Radiation matters were separate to this process).

As outlined in this [blog](#) FPR made written submissions to both. The experience confirmed FPR's perception of the many weaknesses in State development assessment processes, including the failure to include mitigation or best practice measures, proposed by environmental consultants, to address identified potential risks and the lack of public reporting e.g. as to whether environmental monitoring has occurred, whether any required safeguards are applied.

[Commonwealth approvals](#) confirm that the community will lose public access to Mutton Cove, which after losing Falie Reserve, means “a reduction of approximately 50 percent of accessible public open space within the northern end of the Lefevre Peninsula”. Three and a half (3.5) hectares of seagrass will be removed.

FPR acknowledges that the Commonwealth approval processes (unlike the State) set Environmental Outcomes that are to be met throughout the life of the Sub Yard.

There is also much greater visibility and accountability through Commonwealth requirements. ASA must, within 3 months, develop an Assurance Plan (including as to how the Outcomes will be met). Biennial reports to DCEEW and independent audits are to be conducted, and submitted, to DCEEW every six years. Importantly the Assurance Plan, biennial reports and independent audits are to be made publicly available.

² *Social Impact Assessment*, Nuclear-Powered Submarine Construction Yard, URPS, 29 November 2024

State use of special legislation

Community concern about the State Government's lack of regard for the natural world, and our environmental assets, has been heightened by its recent actions in the Adelaide Parklands and by the declaration of the State's first State Development Area (SDA) across the Peninsula and Gillman. In both instances, special legislation has been passed to expedite development.

In the [Adelaide Parklands](#) this has meant hundreds of trees being removed, for LIV golf, with more at risk for a motorcycle grand prix circuit, the State Government ignoring its own 'significant tree' safeguards and not referring its proposed actions to the Commonwealth re EPBC provisions. Adelaide City Council and community concerns have been ignored, despite more than 50,00 signatures on a public petition.

The Osborne SDA is the first SDA in SA under the *State Development Coordination and Facilitation Act 2025 (SDCF Act)*. While the Coordinator General explained at a recent workshop for City of Port Adelaide Enfield Councillors, that his office wouldn't necessarily step into the decision making-role of other agencies, the threat is clearly there that he could do so if presumably time frames for decisions, or the decisions themselves, do not meet political imperatives. This could be disastrous for the Estuary in relation to the roles of the EPA, the Coast Protection Board and the Department of Environment (as landowner and guardian of the Adelaide Dolphin Sanctuary).

While community consultation is 'open' about the proposed boundaries for the [Osborne SDA](#), the Coordinator-General (CG) advised that the SDA would look at all the State's existing land holdings and seek their most productive use.

Since the proposed boundaries include Mutton Cove, Biodiversity Park, the local golf club, the Royal SA Yacht Squadron, the Port Adelaide Rowing Club, the Girl Guides etc the CG's statements are naturally alarming community members about the fate of Biodiversity Park and Mutton Cove and troubling organisations that lease State land.

Given the State's focus is on "Shaping the future of one of South Australia's premier industrial regions" and there are no stated Objectives for the SDA, the community want to know what regard will be given to public safety (e.g. access to and from the Peninsula) and quality of life and health and well-being of residents (e.g. traffic pollution, loss of further open space) and the prevention of further degradation of the natural environment.

Many in our community feel that too much is being asked of our small Peninsula and that local residents will bear the costs with few benefits. I'd encourage you to highlight the current environmental harms and further risks, with these heightened by the declaration of the Osborne SDA.



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