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Southern Spencer Gulf the focus of latest Aquatic Ecosystem Condition Report

The results are in from the latest series of Aquatic Ecosystem Condition Reports (AECR), with the Southern Spencer Gulf marine ecosystem and the Far North and Flinders Ranges inland surface waters the focus in 2022–23.

The AECR reports are one of the longest ambient monitoring surveys of its type run by the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) to monitor, evaluate and report on water quality from designated regions throughout South Australia.

EPA's Director of Science and Systems Keith Baldry said the results highlighted that the marine environment was dynamic.

"There hasn't been a huge change in condition in any of the biounits we monitored through the marine AECRs," he said.

"There were some slight changes at the site level where some sites increased in percentage of cover of habitat and/or condition and others decreased but none of these were concerning. All results highlighted that we were working in what is a very dynamic marine environment.

"Sixty percent of the marine areas surveyed were classed as 'Good', with the remaining 40% classed as being in 'Fair' condition. Tiparra, Franklin and Dutton were all classed as being in 'Good' condition.

"In the Wardang area there was an improvement from 'Poor' to 'Fair', with the biggest driver for the change in assessment being the improvement in reef condition since the area was last tested five years ago.

"The final area measured, Jussieu, changed slightly in status to be classed as in 'Fair' condition.

"There hasn't been a huge change in the condition of this area, the change in status could be seen to reflect the multiple inputs into this area and that there were higher nutrients to be found in slower moving water in the bays.

"While there has been a slight change in classification, there hasn't been a big change in habitat in this area. There's been a slight drop in apex seagrass species such as *Posidonia*, but reef condition has remained stable."

Habitat is the focus of the marine reports, with marine environments monitored in autumn when seagrass is at its maximum growth. However, assessment for inland water environments occurred during spring and early summer.

As part of the inland water AECR reports, 22 sites were sampled during 2022. These comprised of four sites from the Kati Thanda-Lake Eyre Basin and 18 sites in the Far North and Flinders Ranges.

Seventy three percent of sites were classed as 'Good', with the remaining 27% classed as 'fair'.

Mr Baldry said the results highlighted the need for everyone to take responsibility for their marine or land use by taking measures to reduce any potential source contaminating marine or inland waters, creeks and rivers.