Seagrass: cover within sampling sites

Biodiversity | Coastal and marine

South Australia's environmental trend and condition report cards 2023

Trend **Stable**

Condition **Unknown**

Reliability **Good**

STATE

Trend

The statewide trend in seagrass cover within sampling sites is stable.

In this assessment 'seagrass' refers to the cover of 2 types of seagrass within periodically measured sites (Posidonia and Amphibolis).

The statewide trend in seagrass cover within sampling sites was stable between 2009 and 2021. Regional trends were getting better in one region (Green Adelaide (GA)), stable in 3 regions (Eyre Peninsula (EP), Limestone Coast (LC) and Northern and Yorke (NY)), getting worse in one region (Kangaroo Island (KI)), unknown in 2 regions (Hills and Fleurieu (HF) and South Australian Arid Lands (SAAL)), and not applicable in 2 regions (Alinytjara Wilurara (AW) and Murraylands and Riverland (MR)) (top figure).

The declining trend on KI is attributed to declining water quality and loss of seagrass in Nepean Bay. Loss of seagrass on populated coasts before 2007 was mainly caused by decreased water quality. Large-scale seagrass losses, due to a combination of extreme low tides and hot weather, have also been recorded in some parts of the state.

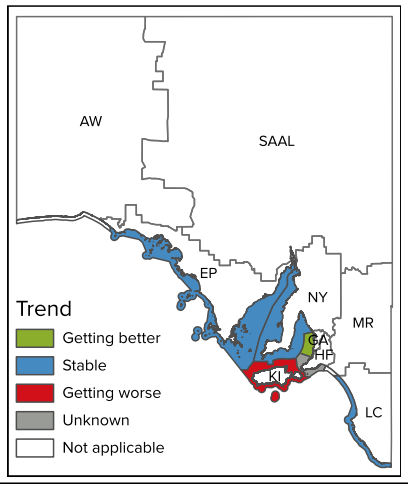
Condition

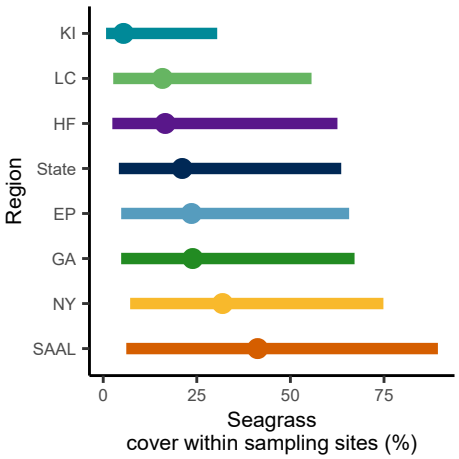
Across South Australia, seagrass cover within sampling sites was estimated at 21.1%, however the condition is rated as unknown as there are no agreed benchmarks.

At a regional level, estimates of seagrass cover within sampling sites were: 5.4% on KI, 15.8% in LC, 16.6% in HF, 23.6% in EP, 23.9% in GA, 31.9% in NY, and 41.2% SAAL (bottom figure). Bars in the graph indicate high variability in seagrass cover.

The historic cover of seagrass in many landscape regions is largely unknown.

The statewide trend in seagrass cover within sampling sites is stable. However, seagrass cover is getting better in some areas and worse in others in response to local conditions.





Why is seagrass important?

Seagrass is important as it traps sediment, reduces wave energy and prevents coastal erosion, which protects coastal infrastructure. Seagrass supports biodiversity by providing food and habitat for marine animals. It is also important for nutrient cycling and carbon storage.

What are the pressures?

Seagrass is primarily threatened by poor water quality, including increased nutrients, sediment loads and turbidity. Poor water quality is caused by stormwater, treated sewage and agricultural run-off, as well as industrial discharges and aquaculture. Disturbance by trawling, boat moorings and dredging can also impact seagrass.

What is being done?

Marine parks and native vegetation legislation provide protection for seagrass from development, clearing and damage.

The Environment Protection Authority periodically monitors seagrass habitats around South Australia to assess their condition and guide management decisions.

Implementation of the Adelaide Coastal Water Quality Improvement Plan is improving water quality for seagrass by reducing nutrient and sediment inputs to Adelaide's coastal waters.

For further information see: technical information

Government of South Australia