

# Algal bloom a threat

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YAWURU traditional owners have known for a long time that Roebuck Bay is home to an incredible diversity of marine life.

However, it wasn't until 1990 that the bay received international recognition with a Ramsar listing.

The Ramsar Convention is an international treaty that focuses on the conservation and wise use of internationally important wetlands.

It was signed by representatives of 18 nations in Ramsar, Iran, in 1971, and bought into force in 1975.

Australia has 64 Ramsar sites, with Roebuck Bay one of 12 in Western Australia.

Australia has given an undertaking that its internationally important wetlands will be conserved. These obligations are met through Commonwealth and State/Territory legislation.

As such, the Department of Environment and Conservation plays a key role in protecting the Roebuck Bay Ramsar site.

This listing is, in part, because the bay is one of the principal sites for wintering shorebirds in Australasia, supporting 20 migratory and two resident species in internationally significant numbers.

The bay also supports about 500 species of benthic invertebrates, the primary food source for these migratory shorebirds.



The Ramsar listing of Roebuck Bay confirms it is one of the wetland wonders of the world.

Picture: Rod Hartvigsen, Murrarji Photography

One of the major threats to the Ramsar values of Roebuck Bay is the outbreaks of *lyngbya majuscula* that have been occurring each year since 2005. The increasing blooms of *lyngbya* indicate that nutrient enrichment of the water in Roebuck Bay is occurring.

*Lyngbya* is a well-known detrimental and toxic blue green algae that is being increasingly seen in other parts of Australia.

In mudflat areas, *lyngbya* can out-compete seagrass and reduce benthos abundance. *Lyngbya* effects can also be serious in tidal creeks.

Once mobile and deposited, the clumped algae cannot be removed easily and large-scale death of mangroves can occur.

Health impacts for humans are equally serious, with severe skin and respiratory irritation and illness from contact.

There are similar consequences for higher marine life such as dugongs that come into contact with *lyngbya*. In response, the Roebuck Bay Working group has developed a *lyngbya* campaign to raise community awareness about *lyngbya* and suggest simple ways residents can take at home and at work to keep Roebuck Bay clean and free from algal blooms.

For details visit [www.roebuck-bay.org.au/lyngbya.php](http://www.roebuck-bay.org.au/lyngbya.php).

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