



Australian Government

Department of the Environment and Heritage
National Oceans Office

Oceans Action Bulletin

An Update from the National Oceans Office

1 April, 2005

This Bulletin updates you on recent progress in implementing Australia's Oceans Policy and regional marine planning. Please forward to any interested parties. For further information or to unsubscribe from this Bulletin, please email samantha.meyer@oceans.gov.au

Northern Research Survey Findings Update

The first scientific survey for more than 150 years along a large stretch of the Northern Territory coastline has found marine species not thought to exist in local waters.

The North Australia Marine Biodiversity Survey is a major research project funded by the National Oceans Office and the Director of National Parks, and supported by the NT Government and the Northern Land Council (NLC). One of its objectives was to investigate inshore waters around Arnhem Land and the Arafura Sea, which were last explored by scientists in the 19th Century.

Seagrasses were a main focus of the survey. Seagrasses are very important habitats for many marine animals and are important feeding grounds for dugong and turtles.



Researchers, traditional owners and crew check locations at the start of a day's sampling

However, across northern Australia, scientists know very little about the types of seagrasses or the extent of these habitats in our coastal waters. During the survey, scientists sampled seagrasses using a variety of methods, and also worked closely with Aboriginal Sea Rangers and Traditional Owners to collect traditional ecological knowledge of species in the inshore marine environment.

During the survey, nearly 400 stations were sampled. Samples have been examined by staff at the NT Museum and are now being analysed by taxonomic specialists throughout Australia. Preliminary results indicate a number of species never before found in the Northern Territory, and many species never previously recorded from the Kakadu and Arnhem Land coasts.

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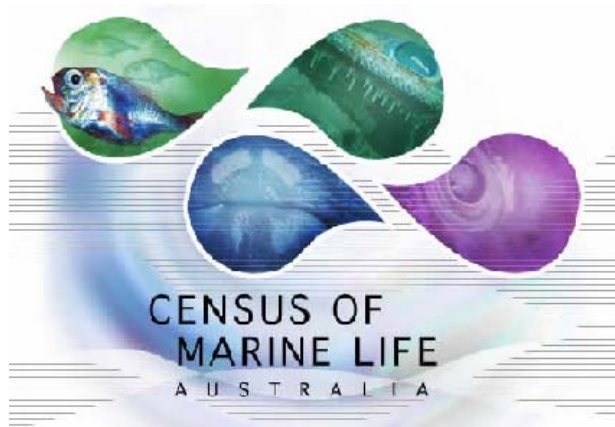
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One of the most important aspects of the survey was the involvement of local Indigenous communities. Traditional Owners and Park Rangers from Kakadu National Park and Traditional Owners and Sea Ranger groups from Croker Island, Goulburn Island (Mardbulk Rangers), Maningrida (Djelk Rangers), Milingimbi, Mooronga Island, and Raminging greatly contributed to the success of the surveys through the sharing of information with scientific researchers. This contribution also helped to develop and strengthen relationships between Indigenous communities and researchers, and it is hoped that this will build the ability of community ranger programs to engage in marine research in the future. The Indigenous people who worked on the survey have a vast knowledge of the plants and animals of NT waters, while scientists are still learning what is out there.

The results of the survey will fill in important information gaps that will assist with marine planning in the Northern Planning Area. The information gathered by the scientists will also be provided back to the Aboriginal communities of Kakadu National Park and the Arnhem Land coast.

The final report is due out in May and results will be posted on the National Oceans Office website www.oceans.gov.au

Census of Marine Life on show at AMSA conference



A one day workshop at the forthcoming Australian Marine Sciences Association (AMSA) annual conference will highlight Australia's work on the Census of Marine Life (CoML) project. The Census is a bold, ten-year international research program with the goal of assessing and explaining the diversity, distribution and abundance of marine organisms throughout the world's oceans. Through field studies conducted in a range of habitats, and other projects, the

Census will enable scientists to compare what once lived in the oceans with what lives there now, and to predict what will live there in the future.

An Australian CoML Committee has been established to provide national coordination for input into the international project. Australia's involvement in the Census will complement our other international commitments to sustainable

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development. Much of the world's oceans remain a mystery and for us to fully appreciate their scale and scope, we must continue to improve our knowledge base. Australia is uniquely placed to contribute to the Census. We have strong credentials in marine science and information management, and we occupy a vast ocean territory with a high level of unique species amid the relatively unexplored Southern Hemisphere oceans.

CoML Australia is hosted by the National Oceans Office.

The Australian CoML Committee will sponsor and host a national Census workshop at the AMSA conference, to be held in Darwin on 13 July, which will be open to all conference participants.

The workshop will focus on potential national contributions to the global Census of Marine Life. It aims to identify research activities that can help improve our collective understanding of Australia's marine biodiversity and how we can contribute this knowledge to the global CoML program. The workshop will also discuss the establishment of a new CoML data sharing network, called the Ocean Biogeographic Information System (OBIS), and explore with participants how Australian data providers can both contribute to this network and make use of it. More detail about this workshop will be available by the end of April.

The Australian CoML Committee has recently launched its website at www.coml.org.au. Information about the activities of CoML Australia is available on this website. As more details of the CoML workshop are established they will be advertised on this site.

Key support for Science Conferences

The Department of Environment and Heritage (DEH) is a key sponsor of two marine science conferences to be held in Darwin in July.

The 2005 AMSA conference (11-13 July) in Darwin will explore the themes of marine biodiversity, biodiscovery and biosecurity. It is sponsored by two branches of the newly formed Marine Division of DEH – the National Oceans Office and the Marine Conservation Branch. For more information on the AMSA conference, visit <http://www.amsa.asn.au/Conference/index.htm>

In the same week, the Australian Society for Fish Biology (ASFB) will also hold its annual conference (14-15 July), incorporating a workshop on 11-12 July, on 'Monitoring Fish Stocks and Aquatic Ecosystems'. The workshop and conference are sponsored by the National Oceans Office and the Sustainable Fisheries Section of DEH. For more information on the ASFB conference, visit <http://www.territorylive.com/asfb2005/home.htm>

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