



Australian Government

Department of the Environment and Heritage
National Oceans Office

Oceans Action Bulletin

An Update from the National Oceans Office

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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 Survey Yields Exciting Results

A three-stage marine science survey of ocean waters off northern Australia is yielding exciting results. Seafloor mapping and sampling by scientists from Geoscience Australia over the past two weeks has revealed the true character and composition of shoals in the southern Gulf of Carpentaria - the shoals are unequivocally submerged coral reefs that support a rich and diverse living coral community.

The survey, in collaboration with scientists from the CSIRO and with the support of the National Oceans Office, Department of the Environment and Heritage, is an exciting opportunity to use new sea floor imaging equipment fitted to the hull of the Australian Government research ship the *RV Southern Surveyor*. Scientists have used a sophisticated sonar seabed mapping system and an underwater corer to sample the limestone reefs in the region.



The RV Southern Surveyor at sea

"The reef geomorphology and composition of the reefs attests to a long history of reef growth extending over at least the past several glacial cycles," said voyage leader, Peter Harris, from Geoscience Australia.

"This makes the Gulf of Carpentaria an important modern coral reef region of Australia, encompassing as many as 50 small coral patch reefs, 1 to 10 km in diameter, plus an elongate platform coral reef that is around 100 km in length, extending westwards from Mornington Island," he said.

The Northern Australian Marine Science Survey 2005 involves three stages, collecting seismic and oceanic data, mapping the sea floor and taking samples from a number of marine ecosystems. The third and final voyage, set to depart Darwin later this month, is planned to explore the ocean floor for natural hydrocarbon seeps and their effect on the environment.

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Oceans Office supports National Marine Education Network

A meeting of marine educators in New South Wales has taken the first steps to establishing a national network of marine discovery centres. The meeting, sponsored by the National Oceans Office, involved representatives of marine discovery centres in Western Australia, South Australia, Victoria, New South Wales and Tasmania. It



follows a workshop convened by the National Oceans Office in 2003, to investigate ways in which marine discovery centres (MDCs) could work more closely and build national capacity.

Mapping out a national future for MDCs

Supporting development of a national network is an action identified in the *South-east Regional Marine Plan*, launched in May last year.

Marine Discovery Centres across Australia have a total of more than 150 000 combined annual visitors, or almost one million Australians over the next six years. While these centres are well situated to reach young people and provide education on marine issues, individual MDCs operate on small budgets and largely in isolation. Establishing a national network will allow the centres to share experiences and successes, pool funds to develop joint resources, and more effectively engage with government to lobby and apply for funding.

The recent meeting, hosted by the Ballina High Marine Studies Centre, developed terms of reference for the group and formed a steering committee to guide development of a formal national network. Tim Hoile, from the Henley Beach Marine Discovery Centre in South Australia, was elected Chair of the National Marine Discovery Centre Network. The next meeting of the MDCs will be held in South Australia in 2006.

Australia Key Player in Year of the Turtle

Work has begun on an awareness raising campaign in the Indian Ocean and South-east Asian region to highlight the conservation needs of marine turtles. The Year of the Turtle will provide increased focus on the need for cooperation between countries in the region to conserve turtles.

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Australia is a signatory to the Indian Ocean and South-east Asia Turtle Memorandum of Understanding, a non-legally binding turtle conservation instrument under the Convention on Migratory Species.

As turtles are migratory species, travelling long distances between different countries, the Turtle MoU is an important instrument through which countries of the region can cooperate to conserve these species.

Australia attended the third meeting of the Signatory States in Bangkok, Thailand, in March this year. The Indonesian Ambassador to Thailand, H.E. Mr Ibrahim Yusuf, signed the MoU on the last day of the meeting, bringing the total number of signatory states to twenty-two. In addition, Malaysia and Timor Leste attended as non-signatory observers.

A key outcome was agreement to hold the regional Year of the Turtle in 2006, to be launched at the start of the fourth meeting of Signatory States (most likely in March 2006). The Year of the Turtle aims to raise awareness of the importance of marine turtles and the need to conserve them. Signatory States welcomed Australia's generous financial contribution to promote the Year of the Turtle and for on-ground activities. Australia will be actively involved in the Year of the Turtle by being a member of the Steering Committee.

Also at this year's meeting, Thailand and Sri Lanka gave presentations on the impact of the tsunami on turtles and nesting beaches. The meeting agreed on a 'resolution' urging countries and other interested parties to ensure that practices are adopted in the re-establishment of fisheries, particularly with regard to minimising bycatch of marine turtles, and to protect marine turtles and their habitat from unsustainable coastal developing, by implementing adequate zoning and long-term planning.

The meeting agreed that the Secretariat should intensify links with counterparts from regional fisheries management organisations to raise the profile of marine turtle bycatch on their respective agendas. Additionally, the meeting adopted a 'resolution' urging Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) to require States to collect data and report on turtle bycatch through observer programs, to develop and implement appropriate combinations of hook design, type of bait, depth, gear specifications and fishing practices to minimise bycatch and mortality of sea turtle.

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