



# Oceans Action Bulletin

**An Update from the National Oceans Office**

**18 February 2005**

This Bulletin keeps you up to date on recent progress in implementing *Australia's Oceans Policy* and regional marine planning. For further information or to unsubscribe from this Bulletin, please email [rani.milne@oceans.gov.au](mailto:rani.milne@oceans.gov.au)

## **National Oceans Office welcomes Assistant Secretary Ian Cresswell**

The National Oceans Office will welcome a new chief when Ian Cresswell takes on the role of Assistant Secretary on Monday, 21 February.



Ian was previously the Assistant Secretary of the Wildlife Trade and Fisheries Assessment Branch with the Department of Environment and Heritage. In this position Ian was responsible for managing the import and export of Australian native wildlife, the assessment of the environmental impact of importing exotic species into Australia, and environmental assessment of Australian fisheries.

Ian has also managed a range of other marine issues within the Department of Environment and Heritage including domestic and international marine species and the establishment of the national representative system of marine protected areas. Ian has more than 20 years experience as a professional manager/scientist working nationally and internationally. He previously held the position of Director of the Australian Biological Resources Study (ABRS) tasked with the discovery and documentation of all Australian species.

During the 1990s Ian took a lead role in the development of several major environmental planning frameworks for Australia including the Interim Biogeographic Regionalisation for Australia (IBRA), the Interim Marine and Coastal Regionalisation for Australia (IMCRA), and the National Vegetation Information System (NVIS). He has worked extensively with state, territory and commonwealth officials, as well as a wide variety of stakeholders.

Ian has also worked for the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity and has played an active part in the formulation of the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF), which is a global project to link the world's biodiversity databases to help improve decision-making.

When asked of the challenges facing the National Oceans Office, he replied, "to continue to seek the best all-round outcomes for marine management that take into account the broad spectrum of uses and still arrive at pragmatic solutions".

Ian's appointment comes under the broader restructure which sees the National Oceans Office incorporated into DEH's new Marine Division, under First Assistant Secretary Max Kitchell.

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## **Major marine science voyage for northern Australia**

The first leg of a major marine research survey in northern Australian waters gets underway next week when the *RV Southern Surveyor* departs Cairns on a project jointly funded through the Department of Environment and Heritage (National Oceans Office), CSIRO Marine Research and Geoscience Australia.

The Australian Government owned ship will be at sea for a total of 77 days for the three-stage survey in what has become a huge cooperative effort between the three agencies. It will also be an opportunity to use the ship's newly installed swath-mapping equipment, capable of taking high-resolution multi-beam images of the sea floor in these relatively little-explored waters.

The first leg begins on Wednesday, 23 February with a comprehensive benthic survey of the south-western Gulf of Carpentaria, concluding on 21 March in Weipa. It will be the first survey to characterise the benthic community and key ecosystem processes in the Gulf and the first attempt to quantify the broad scale effects of commercial fishing. Information gathered will be used in modelling, tools and management advice to support the environmental sustainability of the Northern Prawn Fisheries (NPF) and will contribute to regional marine planning in the Northern Marine Region. While there has been research on bycatch from trawls in the Gulf, little is known about the effects of fishing on the benthic habitats, communities and ecological processes in the NPF.



**The *RV Southern Surveyor* will undertake the three-leg voyage in Northern Australian waters.**

The three-week second leg begins on 22 March, led by Geoscience Australia and focussed on hard-bottomed habitats, offering the opportunity for sampling on deep water reefs and untrawlable grounds that have never been assessed. This survey follows the discovery of three large coral reefs in the southern Gulf last year and will assess whether reef growth is occurring in nearby waters. If coral reefs are found to be widespread in the southern Gulf,

their existence will need to be included in the development of the Northern

Regional Marine Plan as well as fisheries management decisions.

A third voyage will focus on natural hydrocarbon seeps in the Arafura Sea. Beginning in Darwin on April 29 and returning on 28 May, this survey has been planned to collect seismic and oceanic data, map the sea floor and take samples over various habitats. Scientists hope the results will shed light on the existence of natural hydrocarbon seeps and their effects on the benthic environment, providing a link between morphology, sediments and biota. Cold water seeps have been found to be areas of intense biological activity where microbes thrive and form the base of the marine food chain. This expedition

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hopes to provide comparative data for seeps in tropical waters, such as those identified on the Yampi Shelf in the Arafura Sea by Geoscience Australia last year.

This final voyage also enables the first detailed assessment of the benthic biodiversity of the Arafura Sea and how it is related to other nearby regions. Scientists from the Australian network of museums and CSIRO will describe and map the distributions of key species found during the voyage.

National Oceans Office Chief Scientist Dr Sally Troy said the voyages would contribute to the information base for regional marine planning.

“Regional marine plans must be developed with the best available knowledge and these voyages will fill important information gaps so we can make informed management decisions,” Dr Troy said.

## **National CoML Committee Plans Marine Biodiversity Workshop**

In early February, the National Oceans Office organised the third meeting of the National Census of Marine Life (CoML) Committee, which was held in Melbourne. The meeting aimed to provide a national focus for exploring and better coordinating national marine biodiversity and bioinformatics issues and to play a role in promoting Australian biodiversity research.

The CoML Committee has members who are scientists, policy-makers and marine information managers and now has more than 70 nations engaged in this ten-year initiative, which will conclude in 2010. The global Census program ([www.coml.org](http://www.coml.org)) has been designed to answer the questions: what lived in the oceans? what lives in the oceans? and what will live in the oceans?

To start engaging the agencies, managers and scientists concerned with local and regional marine biodiversity issues, the Committee resolved to plan and host a national CoML workshop. It is likely that a one day workshop will be held in conjunction with the Australian Marine Science Association (AMSA) Conference, scheduled for July in Darwin.

The Australian Committee has published its own website: [www.coml.org.au](http://www.coml.org.au). Over the next few weeks more content will be uploaded about the Committee's activities (including updates on the CoML workshop), Australian CoML field projects and relevant information on global and regional CoML biodiversity issues. It is intended that the national Committee will play a role in promoting and coordinating national biodiversity research agendas beyond the life of the global Census program.

The Committee will also oversight development of an Australian Node of the Ocean Biogeographic Information System (OBIS). OBIS ([www.iobis.org](http://www.iobis.org)) is the data network of the global Census program and already contains information on about 30,000 of the estimated 200,000+ marine species in over 4.1 million records. Establishment of the Australian Node will provide an important mechanism for data on Australasian species to be entered into the global network. OBIS is a publicly accessible system that will eventually provide complex data modelling and manipulation tools. Australia has already played a key role in developing software that is used by the network.

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