



Australian Government

Department of the Environment and Heritage
National Oceans Office

Oceans Action Bulletin

An Update from the Marine Division of the
Department of the Environment and Heritage

22 July 2005

This Bulletin updates you on Australian Government activities in the Marine Division. Please forward to any interested parties. For further information or to unsubscribe from this Bulletin, please email samantha.meyer@oceans.gov.au

Call for comment on Elizabeth and Middleton Reefs management plan

A draft management plan for the Elizabeth and Middleton Reefs Marine National Nature Reserve has been made available for public comment.

The Elizabeth and Middleton Reefs Marine National Nature Reserve is located in the Tasman Sea about 600 kilometres east of Coffs Harbour. The reserve includes two separate reefs: Elizabeth Reef and Middleton Reef, which are the peaks of volcanic seamounts. There are more than 20 of these peaks in the Tasman Sea, however very few of them rise above sea level.



***Middleton Reef – aerial View, Mark Hallam,
Department of the Environment and Heritage***

The variety of ecosystems within the Elizabeth and Middleton Reefs Marine National Park are not represented in any other marine protected areas. The reefs are the most southerly coral atolls in the world and their isolated, oceanic environment has led to the development of plant and animal communities that are unique within Australian waters.

There are 307 species of fish known to occur on the reefs and further research is expected to bring that number to 450 species. At least 10 species found in a study of the area by the Australian Museum in 1987 were previously unknown to science.

The Elizabeth and Middleton Reefs Marine National Nature Reserve is a Commonwealth reserve under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.

Copies of the draft plan are available at www.deh.gov.au/coasts/mpa/elizabeth/draft-plan.html or by contacting the Community Information Unit, Department of the Environment and Heritage at ciu@deh.gov.au or on freecall 1800 803 772.

Department of the Environment and Heritage - National Oceans Office:

Phone (03) 6221 5000 ♦ Email: office@oceans.gov.au ♦ Web: www.oceans.gov.au

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Comments must be sent by 30 August 2005 and should be sent to:

Stephen Oxley
Assistant Secretary
Marine Conservation Branch
Department of the Environment and Heritage
Delegate of the Director of National Parks
GPO Box 787
Canberra ACT 2601

Or emailed to: mpa@deh.gov.au

Darwin hosts two major marine science conferences

More than 300 marine scientists, managers and policy makers converged on Darwin last week, as two marine-focused conferences coincided.

The week was officially launched at an icebreaker function at Parliament House, where delegates of the Australian Marine Sciences Association (AMSA) and Australian Society for Fish Biology (ASFB) were welcomed to Darwin.

The Department of the Environment and Heritage was a major sponsor of both events, through the Marine Division.

Presenting the introductory address at the ASFB workshop on national monitoring, Department of the Environment and Heritage (National Oceans Office) head Ian Cresswell stressed the need for integrated information standards and information sharing between organisations. He told delegates that this would be the key to improving science and allowing the establishment of an effective monitoring process for environmental sustainability.



Dr Vicki Nelson attends the display of the Marine Division at the AMSA conference

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Exploring the next great ocean frontier

Included in the AMSA conference was a one-day workshop on the Census of Marine Life. This gathering of marine scientists discussed the next great voyage of discovery in Australia's oceans.



Ian Cresswell and Alicja Mosbauer of the National Oceans Office take questions during the Census of Marine Life workshop

The National Oceans Office, as the secretariat for the Australian Census of Marine Life program, hosted the workshop. It was attended by more than 50 marine scientists and marine educators from around Australia.

Chris Battershill from the Australian Institute of Marine Science presented a paper based on the survey circulated to subscribers of the Oceans Action Bulletin in June. The outcomes of this survey included ideas on future marine science voyages of discovery

as well as lessons learned from previous voyages in Australian and international waters. The results of the survey will be made available on the National Oceans Office website shortly.

Dr Battershill's paper also outlined some of the gaps in information on particular marine species. The other invited speakers included Dr Tim O'Hara from the Museum of Victoria and Dr Pat Hutchings from the Australian Museum in Sydney. Following these presentations, the workshop participants were invited to comment on three key areas:

- where might a marine voyage go?
- where are the particular gaps in species information?
- should there be a one off voyage, or planned series of voyages?

The results of the voyage will feed into an international Census of Marine Life, an ambitious 10-year project that aims to assess the diversity, distribution and abundance of marine life.

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“Previous voyages that have vastly increased our knowledge of Australia’s ocean territory include the joint Australia–New Zealand NORFANZ voyage in 2003, which yielded more than 100 species previously undescribed by science,” said Ian Poiner, from the Census International Scientific Steering Committee.

Australia contributed the findings of this voyage, which explored the deep waters of the Lord Howe Rise and Norfolk Ridge, to the global Census.

“As burgeoning human societies place ever-greater demands on natural systems, it becomes more vital to assess the current state of ecosystems on a species-specific level, to discern the changes that are taking place, and to predict future impacts of these changes,” Dr Poiner said.

The Census of Marine Life is supported by a web-based data tool that provides global information on the distribution of known marine species, including geographical references. The Ocean Biographic Information System (OBIS) supports the Census of Marine Life project, housing all data collected during a multitude of marine science programs. Data gathered in Australia will be fed into the OBIS system, which will feed into the international Census project.

These presentations and the outcomes of the workshop will be available shortly from the Census of Marine Life website www.coml.org.au:8080/.

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