



**Australian Government**

**Department of the Environment and Heritage**  
National Oceans Office

# Oceans Action Bulletin

**An Update from the National Oceans Office**

**27 May 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](mailto:samantha.meyer@oceans.gov.au)

## **International Oceans Gathering**

The contribution of fisheries to sustainable development will be a focus of a key international oceans gathering in New York next month.

The sixth meeting of the United Nations Open-ended Informal Consultative Process on Oceans and the Law of the Sea (UNICPOLOS) will take place at the United Nations headquarters from 6 to 10 June 2005.

UNICPOLOS is the premier multilateral oceans forum. It reports annually to the UN General Assembly, informing its decisions on oceans and law of the sea. Australia has been active in UNICPOLOS since its inception in 1999. Australia is also the current co-chair, with Phil Burgess from the Marine Division of the Department of the Environment and Heritage undertaking this important role.



*Co-Chairs Philip Burgess - Australia (middle) - and Felipe Paolillo - Uruguay (at right) - discuss issues with a delegate at the 2004 UNICPOLOS meeting.*

UNICPOLOS focuses on issues such as conservation and sustainable management in areas beyond national jurisdiction; illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing and flag state responsibilities; promotion of the Global Programme of Action for the protection of the marine environment; coral reef protection; marine scientific research; introduced marine pests; oceans policy; regional marine planning; ecosystem-based management and the global marine assessment. The sixth gathering will focus on fisheries and their contribution to sustainable development, and marine debris.

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UNICPOLOS is open to all States members of the United Nations, UN agencies and UN-approved non-government organisations. Max Kitchell, First Assistant Secretary of the Marine Division, will lead Australia's delegation, which will include officers from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. Dr Ilse Kiessling from the Marine Division will be attending as an independent panellist and expert on marine debris.

More information on the sixth UNICPOLOS meeting is available at:  
[www.un.org/Depts/los/consultative\\_process/consultative\\_process.htm](http://www.un.org/Depts/los/consultative_process/consultative_process.htm).

### **Oceans Portal Tender Awarded**

An Oceans Portal for Australia is a step closer, with the awarding of a contract for development of software to support the project.

The Portal project is designed to help enhance national marine data management and public access to marine data. It is comprised of three parts. The first is the establishment of a marine community committed to sharing data and services via the Internet. This may include government agencies, museums and private organisations. The second component is a Marine Catalogue, through which information will be provided by members of the marine community, and accessed by others. The final component is the Oceans Portal application, which is a tool that allows access to information through the Marine Catalogue.

The contract awarded this week is for the development of software to help build the Oceans Portal application and the Marine Catalogue. It has been awarded to a consortium of Sydney-based Social Change Online and Lisa Soft Pty Ltd.

When complete, the Oceans Portal will allow users to research a topic in one online location and pull together information from a number of participating organisations. The Portal will also provide an online tool to allow users to create a product, such as a map, drawing on this information.

This is the first time information from such a wide range of agencies will be made available in one location. The information will not be stored at the National Oceans Office, but will be accessed from agency databases through the Portal, ensuring that users have access to the most current information housed within each participating agency. Importantly, this project is one of the first steps towards developing true on-line interoperability between government agencies. In this regard the marine community is leading the way.

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### Join the Bass Strait project

A project that aims to document changes to marine ecosystems in Bass Strait is looking for more participants.

The Bass Strait Project is a non-profit program that started in 2002 and now involves more than 140 student researchers in Victoria (Apollo Bay) and Tasmania (King Island). The project is aimed at secondary age students, and has included development of a resource kit for teachers. Activities revolve around changing the perception of the marine environment from one of recreation to that of guardianship and exploration. With guidance from the project coordinator the program can be suited to any age group or funding level. All you need is access to a marine ecosystem.

Participants in the program undertake scientific research in the local marine environment through mediums including snorkelling, scuba, penguin observations and exploration of rocky shores. They then construct detailed scientific reports, presenting their data and providing conclusions and recommendations relating to their research. After multiple research sessions focusing on data including biodiversity, human impacts, and individual populations, students communicate their findings to each other via a web forum. By comparing and contrasting similar data, students are able to draw conclusions about the health of their local marine ecosystem and that of Bass Strait.



*A student on a scuba field trip in Bass Strait*

The Bass Strait Project aims to include as many groups as possible in the collection of scientific data. Participants are now looking back on data collected over the last three years and making important findings about their changing marine ecosystems. For example, over recent months, students on King Island have observed more than twenty nudibranchs of the same species, which had not been recorded at the site during the previous three years.

The program also asks participants to present their findings publicly, through media such as web pages, local newspapers and newsletters. This communication provides a vital link in the understanding and awareness of local marine environments. For more information on the Bass Strait Project visit the forum page at [www.mesa.edu.au/forums](http://www.mesa.edu.au/forums) and let us know about your local marine ecosystem. You can also contact the project coordinator, Ben Camm on [Benjamincamm@hotmail.com](mailto:Benjamincamm@hotmail.com)

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