

**Thursday 6 February 2008**

## **Marine mapping for future knowledge**

**People have been mapping the Australian landscape for decades but when it comes to the underwater world there are huge gaps in our knowledge.**

But this is all set to change with the launch of a State-wide marine habitat mapping project in Coffs Harbour on March 7.

Finding out more about the marine habitats of NSW is vital to the future management of our marine environment. To put it bluntly – if we don't know what's out there, how will we be able to manage and ultimately conserve this vital resource?

The project has been developed by a partnership of coastal Catchment Management Authorities; the NSW Department of Environment and Climate Change and Department of Primary Industries; the Australian Government and researchers from various Universities.

With some of the best minds on the job the latest technology has also been enlisted to map the various marine habitats up and down the NSW coast.

The more traditional digital video and still camera imagery will be combined with the latest swath acoustic methods whereby an entire fan of acoustic beams provides sounding information to give a more accurate picture of the seabed.

An additional component of the project will involve mapping important habitats inside estuaries such as rocky reefs, mangroves, seagrass and saltmarsh.

New information will be added to existing data with the aim of filling the gaps in our knowledge about the habitats that lie beneath our oceans and what condition they are in.

With over \$1 million of Australian Government funding and matching funds from the NSW Government, the \$2 million total budget for the project represents a significant leap forward.

'It is very exciting to undertake a voyage of discovery and there is a good chance we will find things never seen before,' said Dr WEJ Paradise, Chairman of the Hunter-Central Rivers Catchment Management Authority (CMA), the organisation responsible for overall management of the project.'

'Not only are we starting to explore new areas, we will be making that information available to the community so that everyone can see how amazing the marine life is just off our beautiful coastline.'

The community can play an integral role in marine management and local divers in the Solitary Islands Underwater Research Group (SURG) undertook much of the initial habitat mapping in the Solitary Islands Marine Park. Now other groups along the NSW coast will also play an important part in the marine habitat mapping project.

Coastal and Marine Officer with the Hunter-Central Rivers CMA, Brian Hughes, is also a volunteer with the Port Macquarie Underwater Research Group (PURG) and explains, 'Now that this habitat mapping is happening with specialised equipment, volunteer divers can go out in their 'blue backyard' and take a closer look at which species live in different habitats. This information helps scientists understand the biodiversity in more detail, especially those cryptic species that are hard to find.'

For more information on the NSW Marine Habitat Mapping Project, please call Brian Hughes on (02)6551 8994 (ext 222) or 0428 293 021.

### **Interview and photo opportunities**

The launch of the Marine Habitat Mapping Project will take place at the Solitary Islands Marine Park Office, Coffs Harbour Jetty, on March 7 at 11.30am and has been timed to coincide with Seaweeek, a national education campaign run by the Marine Education Society of Australasia to provide information and encourage an appreciation of the sea.

Staff members of the various partner organisations will be available for interview at the launch event.

### **ENDS**

**For media related information contact the Hunter-Central Rivers Catchment Management Authority's Community Education Manager, Tiffany La Gerche, ph:(02)4938 4932 or 0427 980 002**