

REEF WATCHER



Issue 9.3 - August 2006

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Introduction

Welcome to the third edition for the year, which contains flyers and details for two big Reef Watch events (quiz night and AGM/talk), reports on recent events, a dive calendar, and a series of updates on issues relevant to reef conservation.

In the hope that the spring weather will be better this year, we have planned two major monitoring days at Noarlunga and Second Valley. Hope to see you there.



If you currently receive this newsletter in the post and would prefer to receive it by email then let us know at info@reefwatch.asn.au. If you do not have access to the internet and need help obtaining any on-line reports or other information we refer to in this newsletter, call us on 8223 5155 and we'll mail you a hard copy.

Reef Watch currently receives most of its funding from the Adelaide and Mt Lofty Ranges Natural Resources Management Board through the Natural Heritage Trust, with support also coming from the KI and Northern and Yorke NRM Boards.



Government of South Australia
Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges Natural Resources Management Board



A number of other organisations or agencies have provided some funding or in-kind support, including:

Primary Industries and Resources SA

SA Research and Development Institute

Department for Environment & Heritage

PADI Project Aware



City of Onkaparinga



The diving industry has also given considerable support to Reef Watchers for the annual Marathon Dive, Quiz Night and in some cases for dives throughout the year. Details are listed on the website.

The Reef Watch website is www.reefwatch.asn.au

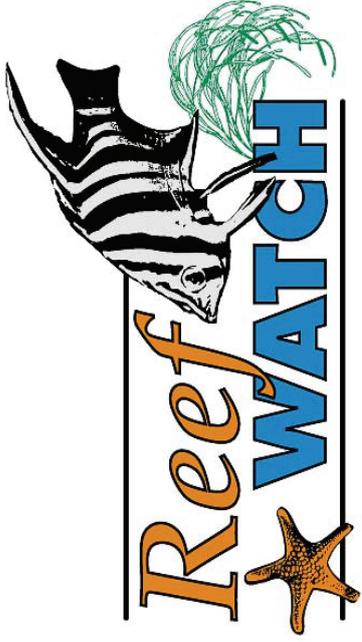
If undeliverable return to:

Reef Watch
Conservation Council of SA Inc.
120 Wakefield St
Adelaide 5000

POSTAGE
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AUSTRALIA



Conservation Council of South Australia Inc



Quiz Night

An audio-visual extravaganza of fun, frivolity, fiction & fact

Form a table or let us find you a seat! There will be something for everyone – you do not need to be a marine biologist, diver or involved in Reef Watch

Friday, 20th October, 7 for 7.30pm (finished by 10.30pm)

- Location:** Reedbeds Community Centre, Fitch Rd, Fulham (enter from Phelps Crt)
- Cost:** \$5 (\$2 unwaged) payable on the night
- Catering:** BYO food and drinks

To book a table or seat, email info@reefwatch.asn.au or phone 8223 5155. Further details are also on-line: <http://www.reefwatch.asn.au/quiznight.html>

Reef Watch In Africa...?

By Dr Sue Murray-Jones, former Reef Watch Coordinator and dedicated committee member over the past six years.

Reef Watch steps up to monitoring reefs in Africa! Well, sort of. I have been asked to take on the job of developing a research program for the Ponta do Ouro project based in Southern

Mozambique, just north of the South African Border, on the east coast. My experience with Reef Watch certainly helped me get the job.

The project is run under the auspices of a local conservation and community development group called All Out Africa (see www.all-out.org). They won't be paying me, but will provide very, very basic accommodation and food. I'll be there for about three months – from Oct to Dec. It's all exciting and a bit scary. No e-mail (or only once a month in Swaziland), overwhelming job, absolutely NO resources, and at this stage not enough time to get grants etc.

The aims for the project include:

- develop and initiate a basic community monitoring program for reef health in the Ponta do Ouro area;
- rationalise and continue collection of dolphin data;
- initiate a study of nesting loggerhead turtles;
- create awareness among volunteers, local inhabitants, tourism operators and international tourists about the importance of caring for their marine environment;
- encourage ecotourism and manage international volunteers

The aims initially expressed were very ambitious, and included complete biodiversity assessments, habitat mapping etc, but I have discussed with them the limits of volunteer programs. I believe these aims are achievable with careful program design and focused questions, at least in terms of what I can get set up and underway, assuming that enthusiastic volunteers are available.

Rather than adapting the temperate reef programs that we are familiar with to suit coral systems, I plan to work with the international Reef Check program. The reefs at Ponta do Ouro are world-famous, and I will think about you while I am pottering around in warm, clear water in my lycra suit!



MPA Update

By Paul Hastings

The proposed Encounter Marine Park may not be declared until 2007 because the proposed Marine Parks Act must be in place first. The Department for Environment and Heritage (DEH) is aiming to release the draft Bill later this year for a period of public consultation, prior to introducing the final Bill into Parliament. The marine parks legislation will set out the process for declaring marine parks and for developing management plans, including formal arrangements for public consultation, managing displaced commercial fishing and aquaculture effort and Parliamentary approval.

The analysis of almost 500 submissions received through the consultation period for the Encounter Marine Park will soon be publicly released in a Summary of Submissions Report. Work is continuing on the refinement of the draft zoning plan and the preparation of a revised zoning map. Changes to the draft zoning map are intended to improve the balance of conservation and will be based on information and advice received through the public submissions. This will be followed by further targeted consultation with key stakeholders and local interest groups. A Regional Impact Assessment Statement (RIAS) supporting the revised zoning plan will be prepared and considered by the Regional Consultative Committee, prior to being submitted to Government for approval. The RIAS is intended to outline any environmental, social and economic implications arising from the proposed zoning arrangements.

Work to develop marine park management/zoning plans for the remaining 18 focus locations comprising the South Australian Representative System of Marine Protected Areas will also proceed once the proposed Marine Parks Act is in place.

SCIENTIFIC WORKING GROUP

Apart from a Marine Advisory Committee and Stakeholder Reference Group, an eight member Scientific Working Group has been established to provide the Government with scientific advice to underpin DEH's marine initiatives. The following people were appointed to the Scientific Working Group: - Professor Anthony Cheshire (Chair), Professor Peter Fairweather, Dr Catherine Kemper, Dr Bronwyn Gillanders, Dr Scoresby Shepherd, Dr Hugh Kirkman, Professor Matthais Tomczak and Associate Professor Sean Connell.

Lobster Retrieves Stolen Wallet

From Steve Reynolds, Scuba Divers Federation SA

A British diver recently found one with a fat wallet in its claws. He prised the wallet free from the lobster's claws and checked its contents. He found a business card for a hairdressing salon in the wallet so he left it with them. The salon surprised their client who had dropped the wallet during a late-night dip.

The clever lobster can be contacted at lobst@net.com

Reef Watch AGM – Celebrating the First Ten Years

It has been a busy year for Reef Watch, during which it has:

- expanded the program to include Intertidal monitoring;
- co-ordinated 18 reef and intertidal monitoring sessions;
- run 17 training sessions on species identification and survey methods;
- held a Marathon Dive at Noarlunga, involving over 40 divers;
- extended Reef Watch activities to Kangaroo Island and Yorke Peninsula;
- run a successful community engagement/education Quiz night;
- run a successful identification workshop;
- produced 4 editions of the *Reef Watcher* newsletter; and
- won the a Civic Trust Award (Natural Category) in March 2006

In fact, it has been a busy decade, with the program taking many important steps towards becoming a credible, long-term, community run monitoring program. However, the program has recently undergone a critical review by the steering committee resulting in a number of recommendations for future progress. It has also been several years since the last opportunity for formal public input into the Reef Watch program.

The last such occasion was a forum in 2002. We are now proposing an annual forum, or AGM, to enable the Steering Committee to report on the previous year, discuss the future and strategic direction of the program, and seek nominations from the community to reform the committee for the forthcoming year.

Reef Watch Annual General Meeting:

Thursday, 9th November, at 7.00pm

The Conservation Centre

**120 Wakefield St, Adelaide
(opposite the fire station)**

This inaugural AGM will be longer than anticipated for future years, as we will review the Reef Watch program over the last decade. Agenda items will include:

- A talk on marine science, conservation and management over the last four or five decades, by Dr Scoresby Shepherd, AO
- A summary of the SARDI-based Reef Health program and surveys, what it means for Reef Watch, and how the Reef Watch data has contributed to our understanding of the health of our reefs, by Dr David "Squid" Turner in his role as the lead scientist on the Reef Health program
- Successes and failures of Reef Watch over the last eight years, by Chris Ball, manager of Coast and Marine Programs at the Conservation Council
- Strategic directions for the Reef Watch Program
- An update on the program for the forthcoming summer
- Formation of the steering committee for the forthcoming year

We will also be displaying a number of short DVDs (each approx 6 minutes duration) on aspects of the Reef Watch program.

If you are not on our email list and wish to receive any relevant agenda papers or updates, then please contact us on 8223 5155

We hope to see you there!

Reef Watch Notes

Reef Watch on Eyre Peninsula

After successful expansion to Kangaroo Island and Yorke Peninsula last year, Reef Watch will be further spreading its fins to Eyre Peninsula, with a focus on Whyalla and Port Lincoln. The first event is currently planned for the weekend of the 18th/19th November, at Whyalla. It will include information sessions, an identification workshops, and training sessions for both divers and snorkellers.

New Grant from Project AWARE

The Reef Watch program was awarded a grant of \$750 by the Project AWARE Foundation (Aquatic World Awareness, Responsibility and Education), for additional training kits to support the increased number of people participating in the Reef Watch program

Southern Oceans Divers Social Club

In recent times the club has reignited its Reef Watch program, with outstanding attendances at monitoring dives and twenty five members enjoyed a highly informative and entertaining identification workshop held at a club meeting.



and Mining Act 1971). However, where necessary, these other acts will be amended for consistency.

- Each Marine Plan has a number of 'ecological variables' and information on each variable will be mapped as a layer over the area covered by the Marine Plan. Other layers include social, economic, and cultural & heritage information. A 5 x 5km grid will divide the information into 'planning units'. These planning units will then be grouped into ecologically rated zones using a Geographic Information System (GIS).
- Activities that are likely to impact the marine environment are also split into 'variables'. These variables are grouped to show where the highest concentration of use occurs, not the actual impact of the use, which is considered equal for each use under this Framework.
- Data used to define ecologically rated zones and gauge concentration of use, will be analysed and reviewed every two and a half years, and each Marine Plan will be reviewed every five years.

The draft Spencer Gulf Marine Plan describes the marine and coastal environment of the upper Spencer Gulf region in detail, and contains eleven maps showing where different habitats occur within the Gulf; different economic uses; current impacts and the ecologically rated zone boundaries. The draft plan also explains why certain areas are selected for certain zones.

For example, in Whyalla, zone 1 areas have been selected because of:

- Diverse marine and coastal habitats
- Wetlands of national importance
- Resident and migratory wader birds
- Geological monument
- Giant cuttlefish breeding ground
- Major spawning area
- Major nursery area.

There is also an Aquatic Reserve nearby to help protect habitat for commercial marine species. Also Point Lowly is one of the potential areas for a marine park.

The draft Spencer Gulf Marine Plan is out for public consultation until **29th September 2006**. Copies are available by contacting the Marine Planning Team on 8124 4900; or online at the DEH Marine Planning website: www.environment.sa.gov.au/coasts/planning.html

For more information, Rosemary Paxinos (Project Officer, Marine Planning, Coast and Marine Conservation Branch) will be providing a Marine Planning update on **Wednesday 30th August - 12.30 - 1.30pm** at the DEH Coorong Boardroom, Level 1, 1 Richmond Road, Keswick (just west of Anzac Highway).

Oh yeah. The story, hey this is hard for a 'fish' with a 5 second attention span. Where was I? Oh yeah, when the fun was over and I had regressed to my normal deflated size we all gathered back at the pylon and to our horror watched as one of these 'cloud makers' had proceeded to destroy our favourite cockling place with their fin strokes. Suzie and Sammy the sponges got ripped from their homes and just floated away into oblivion. In the clouds of silt that were created as this 'cloud maker' swam past we couldn't see anything. Fred the flippin shrimp fled for his life, Harry the sea horse shot off to find another place to hide, Bonza the bullseye beat a very hasty retreat and now we all fear that the place just wont be the same again without them.

Sooo, now I'm appealing to all of you silly looking bubble makers to please keep an eye out for these 'cloud makers' and have a discreet word in their ears about taking a little more care with our homes down here and try practicing and perfecting those buoyancy controlled skills that the bubble makers keep talking about. And when you visit us, take your time down here, look around and have fun but please have a thought for all the homes and families the 'cloud makers' destroy as they just blatantly bash and bludgeon their way across the sea floor and against the pylons.

I've heard whispers from the fish union too, that if these 'cloud makers' keep coming back, then they are even thinking of moving everyone away to a place that the bubble makers won't know about. As for me, that would be a sad day as I personally would really miss the expressions on those goofy looking bubble makers faces as we interact together.

So please be careful down here guys and girls, practice those skills and be aware of what you are destroying down here.

Your friend for now, POP the porcupine puffer fish. PLDAD

Marine Planning Update

By Paul Hastings

The Marine Planning Framework and the draft Spencer Gulf Marine Plan were released by the Department for Environment and Heritage (DEH) during July. The Framework provides the policy structure for Marine Plans. There are a number of key points from the Framework:

- Marine Plans are based on eight marine bioregions that have been identified in SA by the Interim Marine and Coastal Bioregionalisation of Australia (IMCRA)
- The marine plans will be incorporated into the Planning Strategy for South Australia that feeds into local government development plans.
- Marine Plans will control activities defined as 'development' under the Development Act, 1993, but not activities managed under other Acts (eg Fisheries Act, 1982, Aquaculture Act, 2001, Harbours & Navigation Act, 1993

Unfortunately the club recently lost one of its key members, Jenny Gregory, who passed away on the 6th September after a long illness. Jenny had been Secretary of SODS over the past few years and a strong supporter of the club's participation in Reef Watch. Our commiserations to the club and to the family and other friends of Jenny.

Adelaide University Scuba Club

The club continues to dive regularly at Northern Outer Reef, and with half a dozen members trained and others nearby there, they are in a position to begin regular monitoring. They also recently took part in the second, club-based identification workshop, with thanks to Sean Connell, Tim Kildea, Alex Gaut and Scoresby Shepherd.

The club has been sighting more than their share of Harlequin Fish and other species on the *Feral or In Peril* slate in recent times. The club has a great record for passing on such sightings via the *Feral or In Peril* web page. One such report came last year from recent Reef Watch training graduate Andrea Gordon, who was recently awarded the University Sports Associations Bill Scammell Sports Scholarship in 2006, the first time that it had been awarded to a dive club member.

We'll travelled steering committee

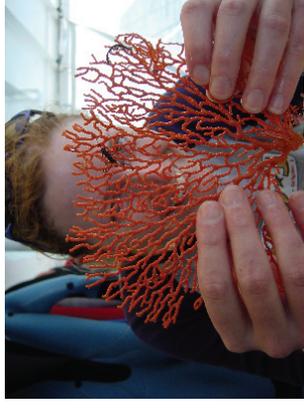
Ali Bloomfield (pictured behind gorgonian coral) recently left Australia for a six month, round the world trip. Sue Murray-Jones is also heading overseas to develop a volunteer-based research project in Mozambique (see separate article).

Both Ali B. and Sue have been extremely dedicated, enthusiastic and capable members of the Steering and Events committees over the past few years. We are missing them already (and Sue hasn't even left yet).

Also, Ali Eaton and Squid are heading to New Zealand for a conference, some networking to spread Reef Watch across the Tasman, and for a well-earned short break!

Latest Reef Watch member

While on the subject of the steering committee, it is unlikely that Greg Ferguson will be leaving the country in a hurry. Congratulations to Greg and partner Milena on the birth of their first child and daughter, Julia.



Noarlunga Harlequin Fish Search Report

Reef Watch ran a *Feral or In Peril* survey at Noarlunga Reef on the 6th August. Despite losing many members to the flu, SODS (Southern Oceans Divers Social Club) backed up their great turnout from last month by providing half of the participants, and it was great to also see representatives from NARCD, BSAC and MLSSA. The Reef Watch committee is determined to have more "gloves-on" involvement this year, and started well with Tim Cuthbertson, Ali Wright and Dr Scoresby Shepherd, AO also joining in. Steve McGuinness and Heather and Mingyon Bird provided boats to ensure that the twenty participants could access all parts of the reef. The conditions were great in every respect other than a fairly strong surge which provided a degree of adventure to the search, and perhaps hampered it to some degree.

The search was aimed at the Reef Watch "In Peril" species - Harlequin Fish, Blue Devils, Blue Groper, Black Cowries, the reef coral *Plesiastraea versipora*, and the "Feral" species European Fan Worms. Divers were issued with identification kits.

Fortunately, none of the feral fan worms were discovered. Less fortunately, the search revealed no fish, perhaps partly due to the conditions. However, three teams found a total of eight colonies of the coral *Plesiastraea*, and one team found a Black Cowry near the edge of the reef. This species can be quite prolific in the same area, with Noarlunga mermaid Mary-Anne Stacey finding 16 breeding pairs in one snorkelling session in the same part of the reef 18 months

ago, all within the large to medium brown circular cupped sponges that were prolific in the deeper parts of the rocky reef. Perhaps we need to be counting these sponges, as well.

The day culminated in a most enjoyable BBQ on the lawns in the sun, thanks to SODS and Reef Watch. It proved to be a great opportunity for the divers from different clubs to catch up and compare notes on the day.

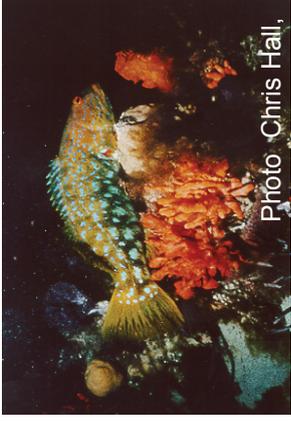


Photo: Chris Hall.

The Importance of Buoyancy Control

Reproduced from the SODS Newsletter with the kind permission of the author

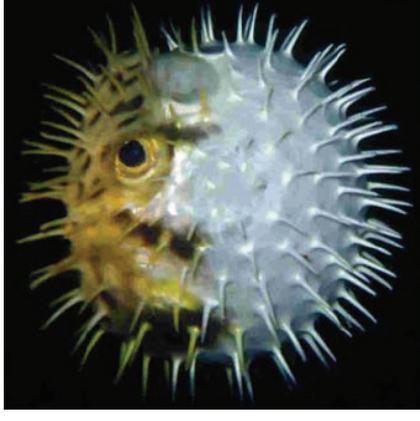
Hi there, I am a porcupine puffer fish, my nick-name is POP. My friends call me that because I like to play games with the silly looking land dwelling creatures that carry those tank things on their back and blow bubbles all the time. I like to let them catch me; 'truth is I swim toward their lights because they're just so pretty' but when I am in their hands I blow up like a ball and hence the nick name.

I am writing to you all today from down here because I have been asked by the fish union to spread the word about a scary new bubble making 'cloud creature' that has been seen down here a lot lately. The word amongst the fish folk is that there is a possibility of a pandemic outbreak that could have some drastic effects on the plant, sponge and other life down here, not to mention the talk that I have heard from above the water about this pest ruining the visibility and enjoyment for the rest of the silly tank wearing land walkers. What I have heard is somewhat vague to me, 'being a fish and all'; but it went on about skills involving trim and buoyancy control being the key factors involved.

Any way, I'll tell you what I know. I have seen many similar looking creatures, being the 'land walkers', AKA 'bubble makers' and when they are down here they mostly swim around a few feet from the bottom with their fins in an up-right position with their 'funny looking' knees bent. (at least I think they are called knees because us 'fish' don't have them) They float around looking at all my friends and some times even send us batty not to mention partially blind momentarily from bright flashing lights that come from strange clear boxes that they point at our faces. I think that these creatures are as intriguing to us 'fish' as we are to them. We don't hurt them and they don't hurt us. However, the pre-mentioned 'cloud pest' is actually another issue and these are quite scary. Let me tell you a little story of their recent path of destruction.

A few weeks ago my friends and I were out and about, gathered at our favourite pylon for our ritual downing of a few cold cockles when we all noticed a group of bubble makers floating around. Not a problem—a flash here and there, no big fuss. I jumped into the action, got a shake up by one of them, did my thing and all were amused.

Did I mention I was valedictorian of my school before taking my masters degree in PLDAD? (that's Professional Land Dwellers Amusement Device, for the lay-people).



Australian Marine Sciences Association SA – 2nd Annual Symposium

How science can assist in the management of marine resources

8th September 2006 - 08:30 - 17:00 +

SARDI Aquatic Sciences, 2 Hamra Ave, West Beach

This symposium aims to bring scientists and managers together to address data availability issues for marine systems, and find ways to fill in the knowledge gaps.

The list of speakers includes:

- The Executive Director of PIRSA Fisheries – Will Zacharin
- The Acting Chief Scientist of SARDI Aquatic Sciences – Tim Ward
- University of Adelaide Associate Professor – Sean Connell

A number of other speakers from SARDI, PIRSA and Universities will present on single species management, habitat management and ecosystem management. Contributions are intended to be critical reflections based on case studies in South Australia: What have we done and what could we do better in the future? What science is needed to improve marine resource management in the state? What are the knowledge gaps?

A poster session will fill the middle part of the day during lunch and a panel discussion will follow the presenters where all speakers are invited to participate, and questions will be taken from the floor.

The Annual General Meeting will follow the Symposium at 4.30pm

Registration fee for the symposium: a small fee is asked for to cover catering: AMSA - SA and "Friends of AMSA-SA" members: Ordinary \$10.00; Student \$5.00; Non-members \$20

For drinks at the social mixer (5pm), they would appreciate gold coin donations.

For registration forms contact:
 AMSA-SA, c/o SARDI Aquatic Sciences
 PO Box 120 Henley Beach SA 5022
 Phone: (08) 8207 5400
 e-mail: sa_amsa@yahoo.com.au

Reef Watch Dive Calendar

The following dives are planned for the forthcoming months. Please note that the details of dives may change, and it is always advisable to check the Reef Watch website in the weeks prior to a scheduled dive, and to ring the information line 04 18 898 302 to get the latest information on what is happening with the next dive.

We generally monitor the weather up to a week before the event, and make early decisions where possible on whether an event will take place. In some cases it is not clear until the day of the dive whether we will be able to dive. Don't leave home without calling the info line number on the day of the dive.

Some dives are listed as being the regular dives for particular clubs, but unless otherwise stated there is room for any other divers wishing to attend and we encourage you to do so! You will notice that we have three dedicated monitoring days, where we will arrange boats where appropriate, provide a BBQ and members of our scientific committee will be on hand to dive with you and answer your questions.

Please let us know by email or phone if you intend to participate in a dive.

Sunday, August 27, 2006	Marine Life Society of SA (MLSSA)	Hallett Cove Meet in car park next to Surf Lifesaving Club at 9am
Sunday, September 03, 2006	Southern Ocean Divers Social Club (SODS)	Port Noarlunga Meet on lawns adjacent to car park at 9am
Tuesday, September 05, 2006	Public Dive	To be determined Reef Watch will be undertaking a dive at some stage during the day. All welcome to join in. Contact Reef Watch for further details.
Saturday, September 09, 2006	Fleurieu Dive Club	Olivers Reef Meet at Spot on Marine (near Victor/Adelaide/Pt Elliot roundabout). Time to be determined.
Sunday, October 08, 2006	Public Dive	Noarlunga Reef Meet on lawn adjacent to car park at 9.00am

Saturday, October 14, 2006	Fleurieu Dive Club	Olivers Reef, Victor Harbor Meet at Spot on Marine (near Victor/Adelaide/Pt Elliot roundabout). Time to be determined.
Saturday/ Sunday, October 21- 22, 2006	Public Dive	Training days, including introductory sessions for snorkellers and qualified divers
Saturday, November 04, 2006	Southern Ocean Divers Social Club (SODS)	Port Noarlunga Meet on lawns adjacent to car park at 9am Important Reef Watch monitoring day - dive with the scientists - boats and BBQ - put another dot on the graph tracking change on Noarlunga Reef
Sunday, November 26, 2006	Marine Life Society of SA (MLSSA)	Hallett Cove Meet in car park adjacent to Surf Lifesaving Club at 9am Important Reef Watch monitoring day - dive with the scientists - BBQ lunch - put another dot on the graph tracking change at Hallett Cove (apart from Noarlunga, this site is the most frequently surveyed by Reef Watch divers.)
Saturday, December 02, 2006	Public Dive	Second Valley - various reefs Meet in car park at 10am Important Reef Watch monitoring day - dive with the scientists - boats and BBQ - put another dot on the graph tracking change at Second Valley, and collect baseline information for monitoring the Encounter Marine Park

Meanwhile more parts of a much larger puzzle started to appear, often in the form of anecdotal evidence tendered by people who became interested in the story and had a memory sparked. Earlier this year reports were made of many seahorses from as far north as Port Moorowie, where specimens were collected by PIRSA for pathological testing. Also in the middle of March many more seahorses were washed ashore in Foul Bay. Within Innes National Park there have been a number found at Emu Beach, just north of Stenhouse Bay Jetty. There is no real answer to the die-off, which can not be immediately linked to any natural or anthropogenic cause. Significantly there seems to be no recorded precedent worldwide for an occurrence such as this.

What we see is quite widespread and there is no answer yet to suggest a cause for an event of such scope, amongst a single species. If anyone reading this article has any experience of similar events, either current or historical, we would appreciate hearing from them.

I can be contacted at adrian.brown@ozemail.com.au or alternatively you could contact Robert Browne at robert.browne@gmail.com.

Large Crab Gathering Event at Rapid Bay

Adapted from Scuba Divers Federation Bulletin

Three divers were diving at the right (eastward) end of the 'T' section, out from Rapid Bay jetty on 25th June, towards the open sea. They saw a huge gathering of spider crabs covering an area at least 50 by 50 metres with hardly any sea floor between the individual crabs. The divers estimated the numbers in the tens of thousands. None of them had seen anything like this before and thought that the crabs were probably mating. Some of the bigger ones had a lighter shell colour and were soft.

Was this an isolated incident? Probably not! We reported the very same thing happening in Port Phillip Bay in Victoria at the same time last year. According to our June 2005 news sheet, underwater footage of about 50,000 spider crabs aggregating was televised. The reason for the gathering crabs was not known at the time. The exact location of the crabs was kept secret to protect them.

Large spider crab aggregations have also occurred off Tasmania. According to "Marine Decapod Crustacea of Southern Australia – A Guide to Identification" by Gary C B Poore, the species *Leptomithrax gaimardii* is often reported by divers as occurring in large numbers in a few metres depth along the Victorian and Tasmanian coasts.

SARFAC's Trevor Watts says that he had the same experience on a dive training course about 15 years ago in American River. He says that crabs were "balled up in the thousands."

Seahorse strandings

By Adrian Brown

Often life's a puzzle, throwing us little pieces of a much larger picture, but seldom offering an answer. So it has been with the recent spate of seahorse die offs occurring on the beaches of the Lower Yorke Peninsula, along some hundred kilometres of coastline, from Stenhouse Bay in the South to Port Moorowie in the north. The first pieces of the puzzle arrived at my feet at the beginning of June this year, when over a long weekend I collected 75 specimens from amongst the sea-wrack left by a falling morning tide. All but nine came from the beach that lies near the wreck of the Willyama, the remainder came from below Hillock Point, some 8.5 km to the north. It was with this that the extent of the event first became apparent.

A second event occurred in similar fashion when I found myself walking the same short stretch of beach some four weeks later. On this occasion there were 300 of these diminutive creatures scattered evenly along the beach. All were fresh with some still showing signs of life. Coupled with this were widespread reports, taken up by the media, of thousands of seahorses washing up along the shoreline at Foul Bay, 20 to 30 kilometres to the north of the Marion Bay township.

In the time between these two events the first seahorses had been taken to the South Australian Museum where problems with identification became apparent. They weren't keying out to any of the possible species of *Hippocampus* that are expected for South Australia. This coupled with the confused state of the taxonomic identification of the genus here means their identity still remains a mystery.

Museum records show that we could expect to see either *Hippocampus breviceps* (Short-headed Seahorse) or maybe *H. whitei* (Whites Seahorse). Another complication was the appearance of a species named *H. novaehollandiae* (New Holland Seahorse) which had been described in the mid nineteenth century, but later found to be a synonym of *H. whitei*. Several of the specimens in the SA Museum's collection were labelled as *H. novaehollandiae*, including a group collected at Corry Point in 1912.

Keying out the collected specimens has ruled out *H. whitei* and *H. breviceps*. *Hippocampus abdominalis*, the much larger and quite distinctive Pot-bellied Seahorse, is also not a candidate, leaving us struggling for a known species for identification. It may be that the answer lies in a species found in Western Australia, although this has not been checked yet.



Yorke Peninsula Update

By Steve Leske

On May 6th Edithburgh was the site for the 2nd Reef Watch training on York Peninsula.

The morning turned out a little chilly so our keen group of 7 headed to a local café for an informal briefing session over a coffee and fresh cake. We discussed methods of fish identification and watched a slide show to learn to ID fish that we would hopefully see on the afternoon dive. We then learnt how use a 50m hand reel in a buddy team while counting and recording numbers of fish.

In the afternoon our group was joined by two divers from Underwater Sports in Adelaide. Armed with our Reef Watch slates and reels we entered the water at the jetty steps, planning to begin our fish ID training at the end of the jetty where the fish life is very abundant. Although the vis was not great we were able to identify many of the fish on the slate and then do some practice fish counts. After the dive we had a quick debrief and tried to figure out what that little green fish was (pygmy leatherjacket). A great day and a great dive even if the weather proved to be a little challenging. The dives planned for the next day were cancelled due to the forecast of 30 knot winds .

On May 20th it was back to Edithburgh. This time we chose the swimming pool for a snorkel session with 4 very enthusiastic snorkellers. With the water down to 17°C and two people not having good wet suits we kept it short, doing two fish surveys and then heading back to the cars to get warm.

We found the shallow water in front of the pool had a huge variety of fish species, particularly blue-throated wrasse and lots of different juvenile species. We decided that we would now wait till the water warms again in October before the next snorkel session.

In the afternoon 4 divers from Glenelg Scuba joined 2 divers from Yorkes to dive at the pool. Swimming out to get 5m depth, one diver spotted a huge flathead – which actually turned out to be a baby wobbling shark! Again we saw an amazing variety of fish, especially juveniles. At the end of the dive we looked for Leafy Sea Dragons amongst the brown algae but unfortunately they were too well hidden for us to find.

The next Reef Watch activities on Yorke Peninsula will be planned for locations on both sides of the peninsula (depending on weather of course) and will be held on 28th/29th October, and then on the 25th/26th November.



Intertidal Update

By Paul Hastings & Agnès Cantin

On July 13, Reef Watch held a public lecture on Intertidal Monitoring at the SA Conservation Centre. Dr Kirsten Benkendorff from Flinders University spoke passionately to an audience of 30 about Intertidal reefs and the need for community monitoring.

Kirsten's talk was followed by Agnès Cantin (Reef Watch Intertidal Project Officer), who spoke on the Reef Watch Intertidal Monitoring Program. The evening was a great success with audience members engaging in questions well past the 9pm finish time. Thanks to both speakers and those that attended for a very informative and interesting evening.

An intertidal monitoring group has recently formed at Aldinga. They are meeting regularly and will be monitoring Snapper Point in the coming summer. We have organised several events for those interested in gaining a hands-on experience of the intertidal program.

- Sunday 26th August:
Introductory workshop.
Snapper Point, Aldinga.
10:00-12:00pm.
- Saturday 9th September:
Tideline Explorers Meeting
at 4 Dunstan Street 10.00 -
12.00pm.
- Sunday 10th September
Intertidal Monitoring. Full
Workshop (4 types of
Survey), 9:30 - 12.00pm.



More details regarding these workshops will be sent out via email, or you can directly contact Agnes Cantin (Reef Watch Intertidal Project Officer):

agnes.cantin@flinders.edu.au

0427 183 734.

Want to get involved in Reef Watch?

For diving or snorkeling activities, visit our website and follow the quick link to "Next dive". For photos and stories, see "Recent dives".

If you want to get involved as a volunteer in our committee, administration or development work, contact Reef Watch at the Conservation Council, 8223 5155, info@reefwatch.asn.au.

Maslin Beach Press Release

On 21st July 2006, Local Member for Kingston, Mr Kym Richardson arranged for Greg Hunt, MP - Secretary to the Federal Minister for the Environment to visit the failed quarry rehabilitation project at Maslin Beach.

Frustrated at the lack of State Government action in relation to the quarry, City of Onkaparinga took on a role of advocate and employed consultants Hassel Pty Ltd in 2000.

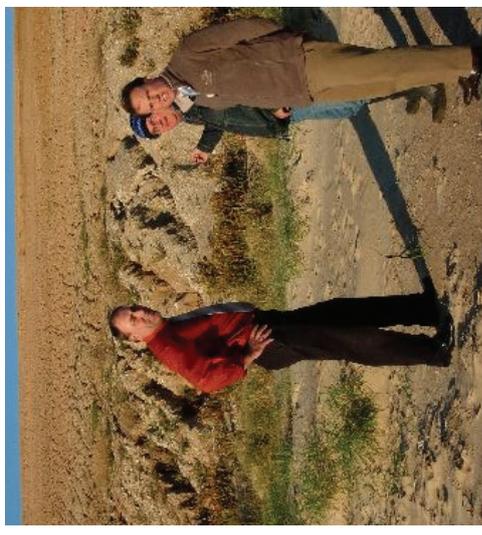
In November 2000 a well attended public meeting was held at the Maslin Beach Community Hall. At the meeting there was significant support for a series of wetlands to be incorporated into the project design. Retention and treatment of stormwater from the surrounding catchment area was considered a fundamental requirement. The State Government subsequently conducted their own review that ignored the expectations of the community, made no provision

for wetlands made other major departures from the concept developed by Hassel Pty Ltd.

Despite a request for a moratorium to the then State Minister for Environment and Conservation and local MP Mr John Hill, the project proceeded at a cost of \$800,000.

The project failed to provide for stormwater retention and treatment, has been responsible for a significant increase in silt discharge into Gulf waters and has left the area in an unfinished state.

Mr Hunt described the state of the site as "disgraceful" and "one of the worst examples of coastal negligence" he has seen.



Concerned Maslin Beach resident John Houlihan, Member for Kingston, Kym Richardson and Parliamentary Secretary, Mr Greg Hunt.