



The coast, so central to the Australian lifestyle, needs a development blueprint. Tony Haymet

Blueprint planning for national coastal development

Responsibility for Australia’s increasingly pressured coastal strip is shared by numerous jurisdictions, including local, state and commonwealth governments. This has made fundamental strategic planning for its sustainable development difficult to coordinate. Now, the CSIRO divisions of Land and Water, Marine Research, and Sustainable Ecosystems are working together to consider the challenge of a nationally coordinated strategic development plan.

Dr Rob Vertessy, Chief of Land and Water, Dr Tony Haymet, Chief of Marine Research, and Dr Andrew Johnson, Chief of Sustainable Ecosystems, are teaming up to scope CSIRO’s potential contribution to coastal sustainability.

‘We like our coastal strip so much that we are grinding our footprint in and we are starting to degrade it,’ said Dr Vertessy. ‘With so many different actors involved and the very rapid pace of development, Australia is lacking a blueprint that articulates the principles about how we should develop the coast with sustainability objectives in mind.’

‘The cross-jurisdictional issues are a

challenge,’ said Dr Haymet. ‘But that’s the very reason why CSIRO should be attracted to it. It requires national scope and size, and the multidisciplinary skills of CSIRO. National delivery in its fullest form could be 10 years away.’

At least six CSIRO divisions and related flagships are doing valuable research into Australia’s coasts, but until now, these have been relatively un-coordinated. With the current coastal science leadership vacuum, the time may be right for CSIRO to help by taking a lead role. Coastal Research is one of the projects the CSIRO Executive Team is investigating with internal Science Investment Planning (SIP) funds.

The three divisional leaders are working on a one-year scoping study to establish a value proposition. They are being supported by Dr Jon Olley (CSIRO Land and Water), Dr John Parslow (CSIRO Marine and Atmospheric Research), Dr Dan Walker (CSIRO Sustainable Ecosystems) and Dr Steve Cork (CSIRO Sustainable Ecosystems), who has been seconded into the coastal branch of the Federal Department of Environment and Heritage.

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‘Coastal zones are seeing enormous development nationally and globally,’ said Dr Johnson. ‘Australia’s growth trajectories should be informed by good science and CSIRO can play a vital role in understanding the socio-economic implications.’

‘Our economic and demographic trajectories should be informed by good science. We have to maintain our ecosystems while supporting sustained growth in our economy.’

In Australia, 86 per cent of our population live in the coastal strip and it seems we are loving our coasts to death. The research being considered is ‘triple bottom line’ assessment considering environment, economic and social factors and not purely economics. There are obvious social and environmental implications of runaway development on the national coastline and CSIRO may be well placed to provide intellectual scientific leadership, as it does for national water use planning.

‘This is an issue that tends to be in the “too-hard basket” for many stakeholders. We’re making a genuine effort to take a look at this problem and see if the time is right for CSIRO to step up and contribute to this difficult area,’ Dr Haymet said.

CSIRO’s Executive Team has approved \$400 000 of SIP funds for the Coasts scoping study. If the Coasts Research proposal is further funded after the scoping study, CSIRO will embark on a five- to seven-year research program. The three divisional Chiefs now have to demonstrate that Coasts Research project’s R&D can be captured, adopted and yield a difference. They firmly believe it can.

● **Lucy Potts**

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