

Vast snapshot of the Barrier Reef's deep life rewards collaboration



A large deepwater sponge and gorgonian corals off the Great Barrier Reef. CSIRO

After more than 300 days sampling at sea, scientists for four major research agencies have begun compiling a rich picture of seabed life across

the length and breadth of Australia's Great Barrier Reef Marine Park to form the basis of maps, databases and management tools that will

help marine resource managers conserve important habitats and biodiversity, and ensure that fisheries are ecologically sustainable.

Principal investigator, Dr Roland Pitcher of CSIRO, said 'This has been the most intensive scientific exploration of the lesser known, deeper seabed of the world's largest marine protected area.'

The next stage of the Great Barrier Reef Seabed Biodiversity Project is now the processing of thousands of plant and animal samples, hundreds of gigabytes of electronic data, and thousands of hours of video data taken from 1400 sites on the continental shelf.

Some 50 scientists and technicians from the four research agencies have contributed skills in biology, ecology, geology, physics and mathematics to the joint effort.

The project is funded by the CRC Reef, the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation and the Department of Environment and Heritage, through the National Oceans Office; agencies that provided vital support for the research vessels and ensured the surveys were completed.

The research effort is also co-funded by the Australian Institute of Marine Science, CSIRO, Queensland Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries and the Queensland Museum, and is affiliated with the global Census of Marine Life, a 10-year effort by researchers in more than 70 countries to assess the distribution, diversity, and abundance of life in the world's oceans.

CRC Reef Program Leader Professor Peter Doherty of AIMS pointed out that the scale of the project is unprecedented worldwide and reinforces both Australia's role as a leader in tropical marine science, and the big benefits of cooperation across our national agencies.

National sustainability charter inquiry opens

The House of Representatives Environment and Heritage Committee has opened an inquiry to determine the feasibility of a national sustainability charter aimed at measurable outcomes across the built environment, water, energy, transport, and general ecological footprint reductions.

The charter, which was recommended when the House of Representatives Standing Committee tabled the landmark *Sustainable Cities* report in September last year, will involve intermediate milestones over specific timeframes.

Dr Mal Washer, Chair of the inquiry, said the significant work already done by organisations and other countries on sustainability objectives would be incorporated in the report to government on what measurable outcomes to include in a charter.

He said the recommendations on the initiative would be aspirational, providing assessable and revisable targets for the



Sydney at night. Australia's cities will be the likely focus of a charter's reductions targets.

Thorsten Rust

Australian community to meet.

'This is a step towards developing a set of "world's best practice" federal guidelines

for sustainable development, based on the input from everyone, including experts from business, industry and community organisations.'

When asked about the reaction to possible demands for heavy reduction targets in some sensitive areas such as energy, water and footprint impacts, he said 'We're dinkum about getting this right. We'll take all inputs and will ensure that the complied recommendations are publicly approved and finalised before they're submitted to government.' He was confident that the inquiry's advice would be taken onboard.

Accordingly, the Committee has invited anyone with an interest in contributing to these national measures to submit information and suggestions.

More information: www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/environ/charter