

## Mission beach

The gentle breeze at Brighton Beach raises hardly a ripple as John Foss, casually draped over his well-waxed surfboard, patiently smiles for the camera.

Managing publicity is one of many skills Foss has acquired since becoming Victorian director of the Surfrider Foundation, a community organisation that aims to protect and enhance Australia's waves and beaches. Two years ago, he might have laughed at the notion of lugging a surfboard to the still waters of Port Phillip Bay.

Foss was prompted to join the foundation by his own experiences at 13th Beach, a popular surfing spot on Victoria's west coast. He says he and his friends have experienced health problems such as earaches, ear, nose and throat infections, stomach upsets and rashes after

surfing there. They blame the nearby Black Rock Treatment Plant, the major discharge point for Geelong's sewage and industrial waste. To find out whether the concerns are

justified, Surfrider has asked the Barwon Water Board to fund an independent study of the health effects of the plant's sewage outfall.

Publicising the situation at 13th Beach is the focus of a campaign that typifies the foundation's motto of 'Conservation,

Activism, Research, Education'.

The 'Outlaw Outfalls' campaign has included protest rallies, information leaflets, newspaper articles and calls for the water board to promote better wastewater management practices and to investigate the

feasibility of a land-based treatment plant for North Geelong's industrial waste.

The phasing out of ocean outfalls is a priority for the foundation. 'Hopefully there'll be no none left in 50 years,' Foss says. 'We've just got to put pressure on to speed the process.'

'A number of plants in Australia already treat sewage as a resource to be managed and utilised. In Ballarat (west of Melbourne) a system exists which converts 210 000 litres of pig effluent a day to useable products including organic fertiliser, fertiliser pellets, methane for electricity and thermic energy production, and recycled water for fertigation, feedlot or industrial floor washing.'

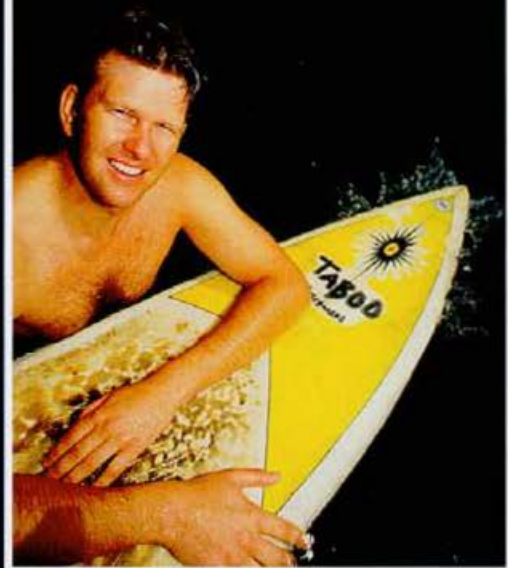
As well as campaigning for improved sewage treatment, Surfrider gathers information about the state of Australia's coast. This is published in its *State of our Surf (SOS)* report. The 1993 report established a database of Australian surfing beaches based on a survey of land use and development; pollution sources; public access; and recreational use. This information was collected by some 150 volunteers at 439 surf beaches.

Dr Neil Hamilton from CSIRO's Division of Wildlife and Ecology helped to design the survey questionnaire, analyse the data and map the results for each region. In return, information collected by the Surfrider network has been included in CAMRIS (see story page 21).

'The foundation's involvement in the science of coastal management is vital,' Hamilton says. 'It has given us access to critically important data. There's no way we could collect this volume of information ourselves.'

In 1995, with funding from Ocean Rescue 2000, Surfrider is expanding this database with a new survey targeting beaches in all but the most remote regions of Australia's coast. The

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project's coordinator, Michael Legge-Wilkinson, says more than 1200 beaches will be represented.

In the meantime, Surfrider's 1800 or so members at 56 branches around the coast will continue their mission of 'Conservation, Activism, Research, Education'. For John Foss, that means working with SANE (Surfers Appreciating Natural Environment) to organise the first ever 'green' surfing contest at Victoria's Bells Beach where resource management and recycling will be promoted. Maybe he'll find time to catch a few real waves as well.

For Surfrider membership details contact: PO Box 444 Mermaid Beach, Qld 4218, (075) 35 0999, fax (075) 76 7157, toll free 016 78 5277.

