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Who should own oceans' IP?

A Western Australian marine scientist has raised concerns about the number of gene patents from marine organisms held by a handful of countries, and proposed a new international system to ensure fair use of the resource.



Credit: istockphoto

Professor Carlos M Duarte, Director of the Oceans Institute at The University of Western Australia, has co-authored a paper in the journal *Science* that reveals that ten countries own 90 per cent of the patents deposited with marine genes. Seventy per cent of these patents belong to United States, Germany and Japan.

'Australia only holds a single patent on marine genes, despite the vast marine biodiversity within its economic exclusive zone,' says Prof. Duarte.

'We need to find an equitable solution if we are to make the most of the biotechnological potentials of marine life to benefit all humankind.'

The researchers estimated that the global market for marine biotechnology – including cancer and HIV-fighting agents – was

US\$2.4 billion in 2004, with average growth of around six per cent per year.

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