

CoML Australia

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1. 2006 ACCOMPLISHMENTS & SCIENTIFIC HIGHLIGHTS

CoML Australia has continued to pursue the possibility of coordinating a voyage of discovery in the Australian region. The 'Voyage of Discovery' Workshop hosted by CoML in 2005 identified waters off the North West coast of Australia as a priority area for such a voyage. As a prelude to the proposed voyage, Australia's CSIRO Marine and Atmospheric Research has refocused an existing voyage scheduled for 2007 or 2008 in this region.

While no resources are available within CoML Australia for the voyage the Chair has approached Australian marine science organisations as well as international organisations seeking support for the proposal. Several members of the CoML Australia committee continue to actively work on the proposal. Unfortunately efforts to secure an appropriate level of support have not been successful to date.

The Oceans Policy Science Advisory Group (OPSAG), which is the Australian Government's marine science coordinating body, has discussed Australia's engagement in CoML. At their last meeting in June 2006, OPSAG set up a sub-committee consisting of CSIRO, the Australian Institute of Marine Science and the Australian Bureau of Rural Sciences to drive the broader CoML agenda, including the proposed voyage of discovery. This sub-committee will plan Australia's continued engagement in the CoML initiative.

The current CoML Australia Committee will shortly complete their term under the existing Terms of Reference. As Chair of CoML Australia I will be seeking input from the members on the current format of the committee, and in particular from the OPSAG sub-committee, on ways and means for Australian marine science agencies to continue to grow their participation in the global CoML initiative.

Progress on the CoML affiliated Great Barrier Reef Seabed Biodiversity Project in the year to July 2006 has included: sorting and identification of seabed fish and invertebrate samples at laboratories, processing of video, consultation and agreement among project participants regarding extra fieldwork and its funding, conduct of additional fieldwork, and preliminary data analyses for a technical workshop with the Task Associate/Steering Committee in mid-December 2005. The project has now completed significantly more vessel days than originally proposed, bringing the total number of sampling sites for seabed habitat and biota to 1340.

Data collected has been entered into databases, preliminary maps have been distributed and sorting and identification of samples at laboratories is almost complete. The preliminary data and substantial

visual material has been loaded onto the Project's website. The co-investigators made a presentation about the Seabed Project to the International Scientific Steering Committee of the CoML at its meeting in Cairns in 2005. The annual report for 2005-2006 for this project is at Attachment D.

2. SOCIETAL BENEFITS, IMPACT & APPLICATIONS

The CoML Australia initiative supports the concept of making data and information more widely available and provides other opportunities for adding value in the marine research field. The information collected through this initiative will contribute to building a clearer picture of marine life within the Australian region.

CoML Australia is seeking to address information gaps in the oceans with particular projects focused on the relatively unexplored deeper waters. The North-west and North-east regions of Australia have been identified as priority areas for further exploration.

3. WORK PLANNED FOR 2007

To inform CoML Australia planning for a "Voyage of Discovery", the Department of the Environment and Heritage (DEH) will collaborate with CSIRO Marine and Atmospheric Research in July 2007 to undertake a biodiversity survey of deep water habitats in the waters off North-western Australia. This project aims to collect information on the distribution of deep seabed habitats and benthic fauna in this relatively unexplored region. The information will contribute to a circum-Australia collection of deep shelf and slope benthic fauna that can be used to test hypotheses on the evolution and biogeography of Australia's biodiversity. It will also contribute to the validation and refinement of a marine bioregionalisation in this region.

4. EDUCATION & OUTREACH

Due to resource constraints, CoML Australia has been limited in its ability to develop education and outreach material. However, it has had a role in circulating information relating to progress with the affiliated Great Barrier Reef Seabed Biodiversity Project and Census of Antarctic Marine Life, and information provided by the CoML International outreach officer. The main audience for this information has been the CoML Australia Committee itself; however information has been circulated to a wider Australian marine science audience where appropriate.

The affiliated project being led by the Australian Institute of Marine Science, the Great Barrier Reef Seabed Biodiversity Project, has been very successful in outreach to the community through regular press releases and an educational website:
<http://www.reef.crc.org.au/resprogram/programC/seabed/index.htm>.

5. GEOGRAPHIC EXPANSION

The 2007 collaborative biodiversity survey in the relatively unexplored deep water habitats in the waters off North-western Australia will expand knowledge of the marine environment. This region has been identified as a priority by CoML Australia.

The CoML affiliated Great Barrier Reef Seabed Biodiversity Project will provide a detailed picture of the reef system. This will contribute to our understanding of biodiversity in tropical reef systems.

6. PARTNERSHIPS & COLLABORATION

a. Partnerships

Organization Name	Point-of-Contact (Name)	Nature of Relationship
CRC Reef Research Centre	Dr Roland Pitcher (CSIRO)	CoML affiliated project
Oceans Policy Science Advisory Group	Dr Ian Poiner (AIMS) Dr Tony Haymet (CSIRO) Stephen Bygrave (BRS)	Support and advice

b. Links to CoML Ocean Realm Projects

Project Name	Liaison or Cross-over personnel	Nature of Relationship
Connectivity amongst seamounts in the South-east Marine Region (of Australia)	Dr Alan Williams, CSIRO Marine and Atmospheric Research	Possibility of developing linkages with CoML CenSeam Project
Census of Antarctic Marine Life	Prof Michael Stoddart and Dr Vicki Wadley, Australian Antarctic Division	Regular liaison and exploration of program linkages.

c. Links to other CoML National and Regional Implementation Committees (NRICs)

NRIC	Liaison or Cross-over personnel	Nature of Relationship
Canada		
Caribbean		
China		
Europe		
Indian Ocean		
Japan		
South America		
Sub-Saharan Africa		
USA	Mark Fornwall	Discussing linkages between OBIS nodes in the US, Australia, and New Zealand.

d. Liaisons to CoML Cross-Cutting Groups

Project Name	Liaison Name & Institution	Nature of the Relationship
OBIS	Emma Campbell, DEH Tony Rees, CSIRO Marine and	OBIS AU Regional Node Manager OBIS International Steering Committee

	Atmospheric Research	
HMAP	Neil Klaer, CSIRO Marine and Atmospheric Research	CoML Australia member
FMAP		
SCOR Tech Panel	John Gunn, CSIRO Marine and Atmospheric Research	Member of Oceans Policy Science Advisory Group
E&O	Miranda Carver, DEH	CoML Australia Secretariat
Barcoding	Dr Robert Ward, Dr Ian Poiner, CSIRO Marine and Atmospheric Research	Chair FISH-BOL CoML SSC member

e. Effectiveness of the Partnerships and collaborations

Relationship building has largely been opportunistic and ad-hoc. In 2007 the OPSAG sub committee on CoML will look at mechanisms for future collaboration in CoML and related initiatives.

7. APPENDICES

Please refer to the following attachments:

- Milestones (Attachment A)
- Current Funding Report (Attachment B)
- Future Funding Needs report (Attachment C)
- Reports from Affiliated Project: GBR Seabed Biodiversity Project (Attachment D)