

# The Dragon's Lair...

Project Officer Jeremy Gramp  
Dragon Search (SA)  
c/- 120 Wakefield St  
ADELAIDE SA 5000  
Phone (08) 8223 5155  
Fax (08) 8232 4782

National Dragon Search Project  
Newsletter, July 2000  
Volume 4, Number 2



## Leafy Seadragon - SA's new Marine Emblem

On 11 April the State Environment Minister, The Hon. Iain Evans announced the leafy seadragon as South Australia's State marine emblem. Minister Evans is to be congratulated on providing South Australia with a prominent icon that promotes marine care and the wellbeing of our marine environment. For many years marine conservationists, including divers, have recognised the 'leafy' as South Australia's 'unofficial state fish'. It is fantastic to see it formally recognised. Many organisations and individuals have been actively campaigning over the last five years for the leafy to become the State marine emblem. The Marine Life Society of SA, Dragon Search, Marine & Coastal Community Network, Threatened Species Network and the Scuba Divers Federation deserve special mention, but thanks and congratulations to everyone involved.



The Hon. Iain Evans announcing SA's new marine emblem. Photo: David Edey.

## Rapid Bay Jetty

It appears that the future of Rapid Bay Jetty is assured. Representatives of Transport SA recently met with representatives from the Scuba Divers Federation, SA Recreational Fishing Advisory Committee and the Fleurieu Peninsula Recreational Fishing Committee. The outcome of the meeting was a verbal agreement that no part of the jetty - including the 'dolphins' at either end of the main 'T' section - would be demolished, and in fact an upgrade to a reasonable recreational standard is likely to take place during the next 2-3 years.

Other outcomes of the meeting included:

- Transport SA will waive the usual \$10,000 storm damage liability by the future lessor of the jetty.
- The landing and steps permitting entry and exit from water level will be repaired providing access to the water for divers.
- Transport SA has no objection to volunteer work being carried out on the jetty, e.g. gear lock up cages can be built at the end of the jetty.

Although the above decisions have not been guaranteed in writing it is highly unlikely that any demolition of the jetty will take place. Minister for Environment and Heritage The Hon. Iain Evans has recently written to the

Minister for Transport The Hon. Diana Laidlaw raising the issue of Rapid Bay Jetty and the resident leafy seadragon population, and offered the assistance of his Office in preserving the jetty.

Congratulations to all those involved and special thanks to Transport SA and the Department for Environment and Heritage for not only keeping the whole of Rapid Bay Jetty accessible to local and international divers but also in preserving the spectacular marine community that lives underneath it.

## SA Database Update

Marine ecologist Janine Baker has completed a further interim report of the South Australian Dragon Search data. To date, the analysis incorporates all of the seadragon sighting data Dragon Search (SA) has received up until November 1999. The progressive analysis of the New South Wales and Western Australian Dragon Search

data will be completed in the near future. When the Dragon Search programs across southern Australia come to an end, we hope to have a more complete picture of the distribution, and some understanding of the basic ecology of seadragons. It is of utmost importance that sightings of seadragons continue to be reported to Dragon Search, as the more sightings we receive, the more useful the dataset becomes.

Space does not permit the full Dragon Search (SA) report to be printed in *The Dragon's Lair*; rather, two specific aspects of the data, habitat preference and seasonal sightings of brooding male seadragons are presented.

### Habitat Preference

To date, habitat type has been specified for 96 weedy sightings and 109 leafy sightings. Although there appears to be some lack of standardisation between divers in recording habitat details, notable results to date include:

- the low incidence of seadragon sightings on bare sand and/or rubble (2% of weedy sightings and 3% of leafy sightings), which might reflect less food availability in waters over bare substrate, and/or seadragons' habitat preference for vegetation as a means of camouflage;
- the similar incidence of sightings over seagrass, for both weedies and leafies (27% and 30% respectively of sightings);
- the higher incidence (51% for weedies and 47% for leafies) of sightings over reef (including the two

categories: *macroalgal-dominated reef* and *reef of unspecified cover*)

- records of both leafy and weedy seadragons observed feeding over seagrass beds and macroalgal reefs.

Divers are more likely to dive over seagrass beds and reefs, rather than bare substrate, and therefore the low incidence of sightings in the latter habitat cannot be used as conclusive evidence of habitat preference for vegetated sites. However, we can infer from these data that both leafies and weedies utilise both macroalgal-dominated reef and seagrass habitats.

### Brooding Male Seadragons

Brooding males of both leafy and weedy species were most commonly sighted during late spring to summer (Figure 1). For example, at a statewide level, with data pooled for all years, 19 individual sightings of brooding leafy males were made between the months of October and January. The largest number of weedy brood male sightings occurred between October and November (13 sightings). Little can be inferred from the relatively low number of weedy brood male sightings in December, due to the unstandardised and opportunistic nature of Dragon Search record collection. No brooding males of either species were observed during March to July in any year. Brood males of both species have been observed at sites in Gulf St Vincent, from September to January. From Encounter Bay sites, leafy brood males have been recorded between October to December, and weedy brood males from August to February.

Although most dives were undertaken during the warmer months, 33 sightings each of both leafies and weedies (12% and 12.5% respectively of all sightings to November 1999) occurred during the winter months (June to August). To date, no live brooding male seadragons have been recorded by Dragon Searchers during this time. The Dragon Search records support available evidence that the reproductive period for these two species occurs during late spring to summer.

The majority (80% for leafies, 86% for weedies) of brood male sightings have been of a single male with eggs, although for both species, there have been two records of two brooding males in a group, and one record of three males per group. There has been one record from Victor Harbor of at least six brooding male leafy seadragons sighted together.

A full copy of the Dragon Search (SA) database report can be viewed on the Dragon Search website [www.dragonsearch.asn.au](http://www.dragonsearch.asn.au)

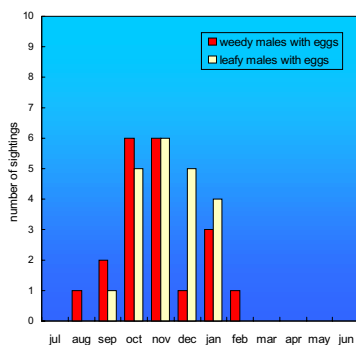


Figure 1. Seasonality of Sighting Brooding Male Seadragons.

## Project Seahorse and CITES

### Background Information

Seahorses are not currently listed on The United Nations Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). CITES seeks to protect wildlife that are at risk because of international trade. It is not a conservation treaty per se and does not address conservation problems arising from domestic trade within a nation or from non-trade causes. The 143 current member countries of CITES agree on lists of species to be entered in Appendices (see below) that denote trade restrictions. These are updated at the Conferences of the Parties held approximately every two years, and are legally binding to member states that have signed the treaty. The eleventh Conference of Parties (CoP 11) ran from 10 to 20 April 2000 in Nairobi, Kenya.

Appendix I lists species currently threatened with extinction for which trade would further endanger the survival of the species. Permits for trade in such species are only granted in exceptional circumstances.

Appendix II lists species not necessarily threatened with extinction at present, but may become so unless trade in specimens of the species is controlled. Permits must be sought for trade. Domestic policy in some countries may prohibit trade in Appendix II species.

Appendix III lists species which are subject to trade regulation to prevent or restrict exploitation, largely in support of national policies.

Project Seahorse recommends against a CITES listing for seahorses at present. CITES listings have proven useful for a number of species but are likely to aggravate conservation concerns for seahorses if implemented now.

The above information was sourced from the Project Seahorse website [www.seahorse.mcgill.ca](http://www.seahorse.mcgill.ca)

### Prior to CoP 11

The US and Australian Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) Scientific Authorities have submitted a discussion document on seahorses to the CITES Secretariat for Parties to consider at the Conference of Parties (CoP 11). My colleagues at Project Seahorse and I are pleased that these two Parties made the decision to pursue such a course, as we considered it could be unproductive to make a proposal for seahorses to be listed on Appendix II at this time without prejudicing our position on any such listing proposals in future CITES Conference of Parties (CoPs).

We are encouraged that the Project Seahorse position statement from July 1999 was formally adopted by both the European Association of Zoos and Aquaria (EAZA) and the European Union of Aquarium Curators (EUAC) at their meetings in October 1999, with all CITES representatives at the meetings requested to take forward our position. We were also pleased that, through our close working relationships with stakeholders, the US CITES Scientific Authority received submissions from the seahorse fishers of the central Philippines and the Hong Kong Chinese Medicine Merchants Association Ltd.

## Leafy Seadragon-friendly Catchment Project Update

Project Seahorse encouraged development of a discussion document, and offered suggestions on its format, so were gratified to read Working Paper 11.36 when it was sent to us in early November 1999.

Although, we are generally comfortable with the tone and content of this briefing, we would like to make a number of suggestions for changes to improve its accuracy or clarify information and positions.

Our hope is that a balanced resolution for seahorse conservation may emerge at CoP 11, based on the recommendations mentioned in Working Paper 11.36 (and our annotated version).

Amanda Vincent  
Project Seahorse

### CoP 11

On Wednesday, 12 April 2000, the US introduced the above-mentioned document on seahorse trade (Doc. 11.36). A working group was established to discuss the issue and the Animals Committee met on Thursday, 13 April, to present a draft resolution directing the Secretariat to assist in obtaining funds to support a technical workshop on seahorse conservation. On Wednesday, 19 April, the Plenary adopted a resolution on the conservation of seahorses (Com. 11.8), requiring Parties to provide all relevant information concerning the status of the species; encouraging scientific research to promote long-term conservation and sustainable use; and convening a technical workshop. It also directs the Animals Committee to prepare a discussion paper on the biological and trade status of seahorses and other members of the Syngnathidae family for CoP-12.

The discussion document, "Trade in seahorses and other members of the family Syngnathidae" (Document 11.36) put forward by the United States and Australia, can be found as a downloadable .pdf file at [www.wcmc.org.uk/CITES/eng/cop/11/docs/36.pdf](http://www.wcmc.org.uk/CITES/eng/cop/11/docs/36.pdf)

Project Seahorse is generally satisfied with the tone and approach of Document 11.36. It is a well-considered document that serves as a useful background on the biology and trade of seahorses and their relatives (Family Syngnathidae), and provides an opportunity for constructive and focused discussion. We also appreciate the emphasis on seeking solutions through collaboration among stakeholders, as this forms the basis of our own conservation and management initiatives.

In the spirit of ensuring maximum cooperation, Project Seahorse wishes to clarify, elaborate, and offer different perspectives on specific points and issues presented in Document 11.36. A summary of our comments on the Document 11.36 is available at [www.seahorse.mcgill.ca/citescop.htm](http://www.seahorse.mcgill.ca/citescop.htm)

Seahorses and CITES listings: a position statement from Project Seahorse can be viewed at [www.seahorse.mcgill.ca/position.htm#cites](http://www.seahorse.mcgill.ca/position.htm#cites)

For general information on CITES, see the CITES website [www.wcmc.org.uk/CITES](http://www.wcmc.org.uk/CITES) or visit the TRAFFIC site [www.traffic.org](http://www.traffic.org).

The above information was sourced from the Project Seahorse website [www.seahorse.mcgill.ca](http://www.seahorse.mcgill.ca)

1999 has been a wonderful year for Greening Australia's habitat restoration work, and the Leafy Seadragon-friendly Catchments Project is no exception.

From now on, as it weaves its way through Coromandel Valley, the Sturt River environment will gradually improve in water quality and will successfully support many more species of native flora and fauna.

Hundreds of people have participated in planting for this project on the slopes and along the riverbanks. Every student from Coromandel Valley Primary School, along with students from Urrbrae and Seaton High Schools and Barmera Primary School, spent many happy hours digging and planting along and above the creekline.



Children planting for the leafy seadragon. Photo: Sheryn Pitman.

The City of Mitcham has made a great start to removing the introduced trees and woody weeds along the river so the process of restoring native vegetation and ecosystems can begin. Sometimes people don't understand why introduced trees cause such problems along riverbanks. Often they create too much shade for other riverbank plants to grow. Their leaves break down at different rates from eucalypt leaves and fall all together in autumn, leading to a lack of oxygen in the water for native aquatic creatures. Also these trees do not provide suitable food or shelter for many native birds, mammals, reptiles and insects, thus our Australian species continue to decline.

To date we've planted around 4000 seedlings, including dryland plants on the hill slopes and wetland species along the river itself. We have specially propagated a variety of species, ranging from native grasses to understorey and canopy plants. Along the river we've planted native sedges and other wetland plants, including some rare callistemons and melaleucas.

It seems such a simple thing to do – reintroducing native plants to such places – yet the benefits are many. In the long term we improve water quality outflows to the sea where the leafy seadragon is struggling to survive in diminishing habitat. We also control erosion, reduce salinity, help with the absorption of greenhouse gases, improve soil condition, establish viable and appropriate seed sources for the future, and of course provide

suitable habitat for many native creatures which need indigenous vegetation communities in order to feed, breed and survive.

Yet another benefit lies in the learning and skills development that comes with the experience of trying to fix degraded land. A well-educated and informed community willing to take action and make changes is a most important and necessary resource in the quest for sustainability.

Hopefully one day in the not too distant future, people will realise that while technology can often provide short term solutions to our environmental problems, long term solutions can only come from changes in our attitudes and behaviour, and that these often revolve around protecting and restoring native vegetation communities. This is not difficult, but requires understanding and effort. Such activities will go far towards assisting creatures such as the leafy seadragon which live in fragile marine environments which so often receive the waste products of our land activities.

Sheryn Pitman  
Greening Australia

### The Fisheries Action Program in SA

In 1997 the Commonwealth Government launched the Natural Heritage Trust (NHT), and with \$1.5 billion devoted to the cause, it was the largest environmental rescue effort ever undertaken by an Australian government. The structure of the NHT is made up of several components or programs, one of which is the Fisheries Action Program (FAP). The components of NHT focus on particular aspects of the environment – land, vegetation, rivers, coasts and marine, and biodiversity.

The prime aim of the FAP is to increase community awareness of fish habitat issues – marine and freshwater – particularly amongst those who access the resource, and to facilitate their involvement in local projects that assist in the sustainable management of fish stocks and their habitat. Over past years, NHT funding has been allocated to a number of groups that have made this their goal, but particularly to those that have also aimed to promote a major shift in community attitudes towards the conservation of fish populations and the environments in which they live.

NHT/FAP generally approves funding for projects that aim to:

- protect and restore fish habitat;
- encourage community participation in activities that will improve fish ecosystems;
- control aquatic pest species;
- encourage fishing practices by both the commercial and recreational sectors that are sustainable and responsible;
- improve awareness of issues that relate to fish and their habitat; and
- promote related research that encourages integrated approaches to fisheries resource use and habitat conservation.

On a national basis, even though the funding allocated to FAP projects (\$9.75 million) for the duration is only a small percentage of the total \$1.25 billion NHT budget, some noteworthy outcomes have been achieved. The Dragon Search project in SA has been successful in having \$44,410 of funding approved for a two year period from 1998 to 2000, for a community based seadragon monitoring program, but since the commencement of the FAP in this State, a number of other extremely worthwhile projects have been either completed or are currently underway.

Perhaps one of the best known projects to receive FAP support in SA is the Marine Discovery Centre associated with the Star of the Sea School at Henley Beach. With the assistance of funding over the past few years, a unique marine education facility has now been established in what was once a disused house adjacent to the school. The Marine Discovery Centre has created a great deal of interest amongst other primary schools around the state, and is now booked out for school visits for most of this year.

Some other FAP funded projects that have either been completed or are in progress include:

- The statewide installation of more than 260 fisheries and marine habitat information signs that promote sustainable and responsible fishing activities.
- A number of ocean-based beach litter surveys to investigate litter origin and abundance.
- The restoration of mangrove habitat in Tumby Bay.
- The development of a training program for responsible commercial fishing activity.
- The development of codes of practice for fish handling and harvesting for sectors of the marine scalefish fishery.
- A recreational fishing and boating activity monitoring program.
- Mapping the extent of a 1993 seagrass dieback event in Spencer Gulf, and examining the impact on fish communities.
- The establishment of an ongoing radio program to improve community awareness of marine environment issues.
- A study of the influence of commercial oyster culture on planktonic food availability in the Franklin Harbour marine ecosystem.
- A water monitoring program in Nepean Bay to identify the cause of the decline in seagrass distribution.
- A study of seagrass faunal relationships in the Gulfs.
- The development of a Fish Habitat Handbook for local district councils to assist those officers involved in planning decisions, which could potentially impact on fish habitat.
- A study of the impact of European carp on native fish habitat in two River Murray wetlands.

Another program that you may have heard of that was set up by the Commonwealth Government under the NHT is Coasts and Clean Seas. This program differs from the FAP in that it focuses on practical actions and on-ground works that tackle the causes of marine environmental degradation.

Applications to the NHT for FAP funding are called on an annual basis, which are then assessed by community based assessment panels assisted by technical advisory panels. The Program is complementary to and is often

closely integrated with other Commonwealth programs in the NHT. The Commonwealth Government coordinates the FAP and all other NHT approved projects in close cooperation with state and territory governments. The FAP and all other programs will continue for the duration of the NHT, which is expected to be September 2002.

Les Gray  
FAP State Coordinator

## WA Update

They're everywhere, they're everywhere! Seadragons are in the media a lot these days. It probably has something to do with the Chinese Year of the Dragon, but it is all part of the general rise in awareness of these denizens of the shallows. Dragon Search has had a direct influence on public awareness of seadragons, other syngnathids and marine conservation issues too! All part of a brilliant and insidious plan by the progenitors of Dragon Search to wake us up to the unique beauty and fragility of our Southern Australian coastline.

In the two years that Dragon Search (WA) has been operational more than 500 sightings have been received and entered to the database. Some are valuable historical sightings, most are recent sightings sent in by locals and travellers who have heard the call for records to build our knowledge on the range, distribution and habits of the mighty seadragons. (NO the mighty seadragon is not a new species, it's just turn of phrase OK?)

In WA the leafy seadragon is totally protected under Fisheries WA legislation. Now a local action group is moving to have the weedy (common) seadragon afforded the same level of protection. The Cottesloe Marine Protection Group has established a petition and is negotiating with the Fisheries department to explore this possibility. Cottesloe is a central metropolitan beach in Perth blessed with long sandy beaches, areas of seagrass and extensive limestone reefs. The group aims to increase scientific research into human impacts in the area and to up the level of protection for the marine life and habitat there. They have a weedy seadragon for their emblem.

A recent report from a dive operator at Bremer Bay on the WA south coast gives some insight to the current levels of interest in seadragons both here and overseas.

"We have just had 'Our WA' Channel 7 here filming underwater with an emphasis on both species of seadragon. We have also recently had a team of Singaporean and New Zealand journalists here viewing the seadragons with a possibility of writing stories with photographs in their magazines and papers about the area and Dragons. A professional underwater photographer, Alex Steffe, has also recently been here and his photographs of the seadragons, with a story, will be appearing in 'Asian Diver' magazine in Feb 2000."

Dragon Search in Western Australia has been highly successful, as it has in its state of origin - South Australia, and elsewhere. The real challenge for us now is to keep the project alive and keep adding to that

database. This will probably mean looking for commercial sponsorship of the project, state by state, or nationally in the longer term. So if you're loaded, philanthropic and looking for a worthwhile project ... look no further ... back the mighty seadragon.

Dennis Beros  
Dragon Search (WA)

## NSW Update

### Syngnathids for Sale

As part of an investigation into the trade in Syngnathids, Dragon Search (NSW) has been visiting various traditional Asian medicine outlets around Sydney to see what is available. Dried seahorses and pipehorses appear to be readily available and quite cheap. The seahorses we have identified so far all appear to be imported from South East Asia, but the pipehorses are Australian natives. Seahorses tend to be sold for about \$1.50 to \$2 each, which is quite a lot considering each animal only weighs a few grams. Pipehorses prices are more varied, with small individuals costing 50 cents, and the larger animals costing up to \$3.50. Following is a list of species identified so far:

- Hedgehog Seahorse (*Hippocampus spinosissimus*)
- Thorny Seahorse (*Hippocampus histrix*)
- Barbour's Seahorse (*Hippocampus barbouri*)
- Double-ended Pipehorse (*Syngnathoides biaculeatus*)
- Spiney Pipehorse (*Solegnathus spinosissimus*)

It is important to remember that this is not illegal, and that many Asian cultures have been using Syngnathids in traditional medicine for hundreds of years. We are looking at this issue to try and estimate the level of trade occurring in Australia, not to in any way attack the traditional medicine using community.

Thanks very much to John Pogonoski from the Australian Museum who helped identify the specimens.

### False Pregnancies

Warm water temperatures prompted an unusual event around Sydney last year: weedy seadragons breeding in late autumn. About five young males at Kurnell in Botany Bay and at least two others off North Bondi were seen carrying eggs in late July and early August. However, a drop in water temperature back to the average for that time of year seemed to have a disastrous effect on all these early pregnancies, as most lost their eggs within days. One of the males was seen to be still carrying some eggs almost two months later, but close inspection showed them to be empty. It is not known whether these individuals bred successfully this past season, but it seems unlikely.

### Ocean Care Day 1999 Report

Sunday 5 December was Ocean Care Day 1999. A range of marine focused activities occurred across the state with focused events organised at Manly, Bondi and Coffs Harbour. The Marine and Coastal Community Network and Dragon Search worked with Manly Environment Centre, The Australian Marine Conservation Society and others to organise an excellent and well-attended marine event at Manly. This year's event was very marine focused with the day's patron, the weedy seadragon, being honoured in all manner of

banners, murals, sand sculpture, face painting and scientific display.

A large-scale marine survey of rare, protected and potentially vulnerable species was conducted under the Dragon Search (NSW) banner. Weedy seadragons, grey nurse sharks, wobbegongs and blue groupers were among some of the species recorded by over two hundred divers from Newcastle to Eden.

To promote life in Sydney Harbour, two touch tanks were set up containing a variety of marine organisms from the harbour. Among these were three species of sea urchin, hermit crabs, shore crabs, turban snails, algae, as well as a newborn crested Port Jackson shark and a newborn spotted wobbegong, courtesy of Oceanworld Manly. The tanks were a major attraction, and volunteers gave brief talks and answered questions from a continuous throng of interested passers-by throughout the day.

There were many other activities and groups involved in OCD 1999 - far too much to mention here. Special thanks is extended to Judy Reises and the volunteers and staff of MEC for making the 7<sup>th</sup> Ocean Care Day at Manly an oceanic and truly successful event.

#### **New Contact Details**

Dragon Search (NSW) & MCCN have moved to:  
c/- University of Technology, Faculty of Science (CBS)  
Westbourne Street, St Leonards, NSW 2065.  
Phone: 02 9436 0176, Fax: 02 9436 0376  
Email: [mccnsw@ozemail.com.au](mailto:mccnsw@ozemail.com.au)

Craig Woodfield  
Dragon Search (NSW)

### **Tasmanian Update**

Dragon Search Tasmania is ticking along with presentations being done on a regular basis. Since the last report to *The Dragon's Lair* I have spoken to The Tasmanian Field Naturalist Association, The Coastcare Festival, Launceston Grammar School and a number of small groups. This numbers some 135+ people. Approximately 150 survey forms have been distributed at these events and through Eaglehawk Dive Centre. It is my belief that many people take the forms mainly for their information value as the number of returns at this stage from the groups mentioned above are minimal.

I have conducted several Dragon Search dives through Eaglehawk Dive Centre with moderate success but the general trend in Tasmania is for those with the interest to be the main source of information. I have several presentations planned for the near future. They are big ones and include one presentation at the Hobart Town Hall for the Parks and Wildlife Service and a marine flavoured Public Meeting in Devonport in conjunction with a speaker from the Fish Action Program.

Gary Myors  
Dragon Search (Tas)

Since writing this article Gary Myors has moved on from the Dragon Search (Tas.) position. Dragon Search (SA)

*The Dragon's Lair* Vol. 4, No. 2, 2000

would like to thank Gary for his efforts during the last two years. The Tasmanian Field Naturalists are pleased to announce that they have appointed a new Dragon Search (Tas.) Coordinator for the last year of Dragon Search (Tas.) funding. The new coordinator, David Bell, is based in Launceston with the aim of encouraging more sightings from the north of the state. Dragon Search (Tas.) also hope to confirm or verify the verbal reports of leafy seadragon sightings from northern Tasmania.

### **Leafy Seadragon Postcards**

Long time marine educator Tony Isaacson has recently produced a leafy seadragon postcard. The classic sized postcard celebrates original artwork (featured below) by Kangaroo Island artist, Bryon Buick, "Leafy" 1997.



'Leafy' 1997. By Bryon Buick.

Purchase of the postcard will assist efforts being made to promote the development of a world class Marine Interpretive Centre at Glenelg, South Australia's premier tourist precinct. The intention of this project is to raise awareness and understanding of our unique marine life heritage and the impact that we have as individuals on all aquatic life. Postcard orders can be made by contacting Tony Isaacson on ph: 08 8377 0935 or email [tiik@adam.com.au](mailto:tiik@adam.com.au).

### **On-line seadragon sighting form**

An on-line version of the Dragon Search seadragon sighting form is now available on the Dragon Search website [www.dragonsearch.asn.au](http://www.dragonsearch.asn.au). The convenience of electronically submitting sightings will hopefully encourage lots more seadragon sightings to be reported to Dragon Search. If you have access to the internet please give it a go!

Thanks must go to Digital Satellite Wholesalers for hosting the Dragon Search website and the Marine Life Society of SA for supplying the computer and account management services.

### **Regional seadragon sightings**

Dragon Search is especially interested in sightings from regional South Australia so that these regions are adequately represented by the Dragon Search Project. If

you dive or visit any regional areas it would be greatly appreciated if you could submit to Dragon Search any sightings of seadragons you encountered. Alternatively if you have any friends or family living in regional areas you might like to let them know about Dragon Search and the importance of reporting any seadragon sightings. Regions that are currently under-represented in the Dragon Search database are the south-east, far west coast, Kangaroo Island and any offshore islands.

### Code of Conduct for diving with dragons

Dragon Search, in conjunction with the South Australian Dept. for Environment & Heritage and Primary Industries & Resources SA - Fisheries, is producing a SCUBA diving 'Code of Conduct for the Observation of Seadragons in the Wild'. With the increased profile of seadragons, there is a concern that without a diving protocol, overly enthusiastic divers may have an adverse effect on particular seadragon populations. Seadragons at dive sites that have a high diver visitation rate are particularly susceptible. The Code of Conduct will be printed in the very near future and included in the next edition of *The Dragon's Lair*. A copy will also be published on the Dragon Search website.

### Sydney Harbour Weedy

For those of you who did not see the New Year's Eve celebrations on Sydney Harbour, a giant inflatable weedy seadragon was paraded around on a barge as part of a procession of marine creatures found in the harbour. The weedy was internally lit and looked very spectacular. At the present time it has been 'dry docked' in shipping containers awaiting its next public appearance.



The inflatable weedy seadragon at Darling Harbour. Photo: Craig Woodfield.

### Seadragon taken by Cormorant

Interesting news from Kangaroo Island, SA. In January 1998 a Dragon Search participant was fishing on the north-east coast of the island in about 6m of water. Nearby, a black faced cormorant dived underwater and came up with a live leafy seadragon in its beak. Regular divers in the area report that they have seen cormorants dive down to a depth of 6m previously, but as to how the cormorant spotted the presumably well camouflaged leafy is a mystery to us. As far as we are aware this is the first report of this type of predation of a seadragon.

### Leafy Yowie

It appears that Cadbury Australia have manufactured a leafy seadragon toy that is contained in their chocolate 'Yowie' product. The leafy joins the weedy seadragon toy that was produced early last year.

### Leafy seadragon permit

Dragon Search (SA) was recently granted, under Section 59 of the *Fisheries Act 1982*, an exemption from provisions of Section 42 of the Act. The exemption allows us to be in possession of two dried beachwashed leafy seadragons that were donated to us for educational purposes. Leafy seadragons are protected in South Australia under the Act therefore being in possession of one (either living or dead) is illegal without a permit. We just wanted to clarify the fact that they were dried leafies in case anyone saw the exemption notice in the South Australian Government Gazette from 17 March 2000 and reassure them that we have no intention of removing seadragons from the wild.

### Dragon Search talks

Just a reminder to let people know that the Dragon Search (SA) Project Officer is available to present talks to dive clubs. The content of the talk can vary to suit your club's needs (but obviously focuses mainly on seadragons and/or Dragon Search). If you are interested then please contact Jeremy Gramp, Dragon Search (SA) Project Officer on ph: (08) 8223 5155. For those of you reading this outside of SA please contact the Dragon Search coordinator in your State to enquire about their availability. The contact details of all Dragon Search coordinators are available on the Dragon Search website.

### Dragon Search t-shirts & stubby holders

As a result of the implementation of the Goods and Services Tax the prices of Dragon Search t-shirts and stubby holders have changed. Rather than increasing the cost of the t-shirts and stubby holders we have decided to sell them at non commercial rates, therefore the GST will not apply. The new cost for t-shirts is \$11, the cost for stubby holders is \$2.50. At this rate they will sell fast so get in quick. For further details and to order phone Dragon Search (SA) on (08) 8223 5155.

### Marine National Parks Brochure

South Australia's marine waters are home to an amazing diversity of marine animals and plants, many of which are found nowhere else in the world.

Despite its uniqueness and beauty, our marine environment is under threat from human activities including sewage and stormwater discharge, poorly managed marine aquaculture, over-exploitation of fisheries and the introduction of pest organisms in ship ballast water.

Compared with other Australian states, South Australia also has the least percentage of its marine environment protected in 'marine national parks'.

The Australian Marine Conservation Society - Adelaide Branch is producing a brochure outlining the role of Marine National Parks and the necessity for not only the need for more parks to be declared but that these parks are managed in a way that safeguards marine habitats and biodiversity. The brochure will be available in the very near future so keep a look out for it.

### Gulf St Vincent Senate Inquiry

The Senate Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts Reference Committee has recently published a report of its Inquiry into Gulf St Vincent.

On 26 August 1999 the Senate referred the following matters to Committee for inquiry and report by the first sitting day in April 2000:

- (a) The state of the environment of Gulf St Vincent;
- (b) The expected impacts on that environment; and
- (c) The possible enhancements to protection measures in relation to that environment.

A copy of the report, incorporating the suggested recommendations, can be viewed at [www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/erca\\_ctte/gulf/index.htm](http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/erca_ctte/gulf/index.htm)

### New Marine Habitat Posters

In 1998 the National Marine & Coastal Community Network (MCCN) produced a series of three marine habitat posters featuring Australia's unique south - 'Seagrass Meadows', 'Sponge Gardens' and 'Forests of the Sea'. The MCCN has just released the final two posters in the series, namely 'Deep Blue Sea' and 'Sandy Plains'. For a copy of the posters contact the Conservation Centre on ph. (08) 8223 5155 or your State MCCN Coordinator on 1800 815 332. The posters are free but if you cannot come and collect them personally a small fee to cover the cost of postage will be charged.

### Invertebrate Workshop

Can you tell the difference between a sponge and a sea squirt? Are you an avid diver or snorkeller, or are you just interested in learning about our unique marine environment? Interested? Well, this workshop is just for you! The workshop is being hosted by Reef Watch, with the support of instructors from SARDI Aquatic Sciences and Flinders and Adelaide Universities. The workshop will encompass both theory and practical, with slides, videos, touch tanks, informative instructors and much more. The workshop, to be held from 9am-4pm 22 October, is being designed for those new to marine identification. Places are limited, so register your interest now!

Contact: Sheralee Cox, Reef Watch Project Officer, on 8223 5155 or [info@reefwatch.asn.au](mailto:info@reefwatch.asn.au).

### SA Museum Fish Section closure?

There are concerns that the Fish Section of the South Australian Museum may possibly be closing down or being 'mothballing' in the near future.

The research of non-commercial fish species and assessment of their status and continued review of taxonomy is of utmost importance in the progression of improved marine conservation, habitat protection and the establishment of marine protected areas in South Australia.

The closing down or mothballing of the fish section and relocation of the collection to another institution - probably in another state - may have some serious implications for the future of fish and marine research in South Australia.

You may wish to write to The Minister for the Arts The Hon. Diana Laidlaw, c/- Parliament House, North Tce, Adelaide, SA 5000, to express any concerns you may have about the uncertainty of the future of the Ichthyology (fish) section of the South Australian Museum.

*The Dragon's Lair*, Vol. 4, No. 2



Dragon Search (SA)  
c/- Conservation Council of SA  
120 Wakefield Street  
ADELAIDE SA 5000

Postage Paid  
in  
Australia

Dragon Search (SA) is supported by:



Department for  
Environment and Heritage  
Government of South Australia



THE MARINE & COASTAL COMMUNITY NETWORK