



MEDIA RELEASE

Senator the Hon Ian Campbell

Minister for the Environment and Heritage

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AUSTRALIAN NETWORK JOINS INTERNATIONAL PROJECT

A new online database will give an insight into the distributions of birdlife and marine species in the Australian region to give us a better understanding of what lies above and beneath the ocean's surface.

A key element to the international Census of Marine Life project, the database was announced by the Minister for the Environment and Heritage, Senator Ian Campbell, today.

The system – which is accessible to the public as well as scientists, students and researchers – will encourage the sharing of marine data by academics, museums, universities and industry research bodies.

Known as the Ocean Biogeographic Information System (OBIS), its Australian node is a partnership of the Department of the Environment and Heritage, through the National Oceans Office and the CSIRO, which hosts the network at its Marine and Atmospheric Research laboratories in Hobart.

"This online database will help us solve the great puzzle of what lives in our ocean, what used to live in our oceans and what will live there in the future," Senator Campbell said.

"We now have a one-stop-shop that can bring together all the data on marine species from isolated field workers to large universities, government departments so that it becomes a virtual lending library of information that was previously unavailable.

"I encourage all custodians of marine species data to share their information through OBIS for the collective advancement of our understanding, which is the principle under which the Census began.

"I am proud that Australia is playing a leading role in the international Census of Marine Life and the launch of OBIS Australia is a significant milestone in this project."

OBIS will provide access to data content and analytical tools such as maps, visualisations and models through an online atlas. Information can be distributed in 3-D form with the fourth dimension of time providing past, present and future modeling of species distributions.

The Australian OBIS node in the marine science hub of Hobart is one of a number to be established around the world, all of which feed information to the central portal at Rutgers University in New Jersey, USA. The Node has a fund to assist data custodians in making their information available through the network.

"This network is quickly becoming populated with data and it will be an essential tool for marine planners, scientists, students and all those who are interested in solving the mysteries of the deep ocean," Senator Campbell said.

The Australian OBIS node is online at: <http://www.obis.org.au/>

More information on the international Census of Marine Life is available at: <http://www.coml.org/>

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