



MEDIA RELEASE

Scientists Set to Assist East Timor's Seas

A leading Northern Territory marine scientist believes marine eco-tourism will one day be a great source of East Timor's economic prosperity.

"East Timor has a rich array of marine wildlife, biodiversity and inshore coral reefs that are virtually untouched," said Professor Edyvane, the Principal Scientist (Marine Biodiversity) of the Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts (NRETA).

"Time will only tell as to how important these natural marine resources will be in the country's economic development, but it is clear that East Timor's Government wants this development to be conducted responsibly and sustainably."

Professor Edyvane said NRETA has obtained East Timor Government funding to undertake several collaborative coastal and marine research, planning and training projects in East Timor, with a view to building local capacity and fostering regional economic development, particularly with marine industries, such as eco-tourism, fisheries and aquaculture.

"Capacity building is the primary focus of all the projects and is critical to the long term economic development of East Timor," Professor Edyvane said.

"It is important that we pass on our skills and knowledge to the East Timorese people, to assist them in managing their rich marine resources, and provide them with sustainable livelihoods and long-term employment opportunities.

"The East Timorese clearly recognise the value of their marine natural resources and biodiversity and have sought our assistance to ensure that these natural resources are developed on an ecological sustainable basis."

Professor Edyvane and other scientists from NRETA, Charles Darwin University and the Australian Institute of Marine Science, as well as cultural experts from the Australian National University, are set to travel to East Timor next month to attend a planning meeting of project participants.

"This workshop will plan and coordinate the wide range of activities proposed, in collaboration with local researchers, agencies and organisations in East Timor," Professor Edyvane said.

"Significantly, these marine and coastal projects in East Timor represent a key plank in the development of a cooperative and collaborative approach to marine research, planning and training projects in the Arafura-Timor region.

"Capacity building and sustainable economic development are essential to the long-term security and conservation of the ocean resources of the region.

"One of NRETA's projects will be planning and establishing East Timor's first marine park.

“This project will be building on NRETA’s previous work in training local East Timorese in managing terrestrial national parks”.

Professor Edyvane’s trip to East Timor also provides her with the chance to spend time with her identical twin sister who works as a surgeon at Timor’s only hospital, in Dili.

“My sister has said that working conditions are quite ‘surreal’ with helicopters flying low over the hospital, and a tank parked outside on one occasion - so it is certainly a world away from Fremantle Hospital where she is normally based,” Professor Edyvane said.

“I don’t have too many security concerns about going to East Timor, but I see this as a tremendous opportunity to help a country and its people build an ecologically sound and sustainable economic future – while conserving their wonderful marine resources. And that can only be good for us in the Northern Territory.

“This is my first trip to East Timor but I certainly hope it is not my last, as it is vitally important that we build a close, long-term and continuous relationship with our nearest neighbour - we have so much to offer each other.”

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Media Note – For more information contact Professor Karen Edyvane on 8920 9261

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