

Media Release:

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Indigenous Sea Rangers Embrace Hi-Tech Marine Science

Indigenous sea rangers and Northern Territory marine scientists are pioneering the first attempt to combine traditional Indigenous ecological knowledge with the latest hi-tech marine mapping technology.

Department of Natural Resources, Environment, The Arts and Sport (NRETAS) and Charles Darwin University marine scientists in partnership with Indigenous sea rangers from the Dhimurru Aboriginal Corporation are nearing the end of their six day survey.

NRETAS Principal Marine Scientist, Professor Karen Edyvane said the seabed mapping survey will utilise the Northern Territory Government's hi-tech underwater remote operated vehicle (ROV) together with the traditional ecological knowledge from Indigenous sea rangers to map the marine seabed features around Bremer Island, off north east Arnhem Land.

"This unique survey will use the latest satellite imagery to map different marine seabed features before exploring and identifying the marine habitats with the ROV," Professor Edyvane said.

"The Northern Territory has such a vast coastline of more than 3000km, most of which is very difficult to access, which means up to now much of our underwater habitats remain largely unmapped.

"Indigenous people have strong cultural and customary connections to their coastal and marine environments and tapping into their knowledge of these habitats is a vital part of our mapping exercise.

"Aside from the vastness of the area, natural hazards found in Territory waters, such as crocodiles, box jellyfish and sharks, make underwater work dangerous - so we have had to develop new approaches to mapping our marine environment."

The Bremer Island survey will test a new methodology that uses high resolution satellite imagery of shallow waters to undertake preliminary mapping of different seabed habitats.

"The satellite information will then be checked using the ROV, which will be operated by scientists and indigenous rangers from the safety of the boat, rather than in hazardous deep water," Professor Edyvane said.

"Operating the ROV is very much like playing a computer game, complete with joystick, but with a real vehicle and video camera providing the underwater view."

The results of the survey will be compiled into a detailed seabed habitat map that will assist Dhimurru Sea Rangers in the management of the marine habitats around Bremer Island in addition to providing scientists with an accurate and very cost-effective methodology for mapping the Territory's marine environment. The survey commenced Tuesday 21 October and will finish this Sunday 26 October 2008.

Ends

Media Note – for more information contact Karen Edyvane on 89209 261 or 0401 115 786

Images:

Dhimurru Sea Ranger PJ Patrick White prepares to launch the ROV

Dhimurru Sea Ranger PJ Patrick White checks out the results on screen

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