

## BACKGROUND

The Department of Transport, as part of their responsibility for the National Plan to Combat Pollution of the Sea by Oil, has been preparing a response plan for the Great Barrier Reef Region. An element of that plan which has not yet been finalised is the scientific response which might be initiated in the event of an oil spill. Such a response has two components; to provide advice on environment protection matters, and to investigate the spill and control measures to provide information which may improve future responses.

Oil spills are an area of potential concern, but there may be other hazardous chemicals transported through the Great Barrier Reef Region. To date, there appears to have been little attention directed towards either a scientific or environmental protection response, in the event of a spill of hazardous chemicals other than oil in the Great Barrier Reef Region. There may be a need to link plans to protect the Reef from an oil spill with similar responses in the event of other hazardous spills.

As part of its Great Barrier Reef Region management responsibilities, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority conducted a workshop on response to hazardous chemical spills in the Great Barrier Reef Region. The workshop was organised to take advantage of the presence in Australia of Professor John Gray from Oslo University, Senior Queen's Fellow in Marine Science at James Cook University and Professor Michael Champ of The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the American University, who is also a Senior Queen's Fellow in Marine Science. Both Queens Fellows are experts in oil (and other oceanic) pollution matters and the measurement and monitoring of its impacts.

The workshop brought together researchers in the areas of risk analysis, marine chemistry, oceanography and marine contaminants, officers from State and Commonwealth Government agencies with interests in this area, and representatives from the Queensland and Torres Strait Pilot Service and industry.

The objective of the workshop was to examine the necessity and feasibility of establishing a response capability, particularly a scientific response capability, for hazardous chemical spills in the Great Barrier Reef Region.

The workshop was presented with a series of papers, covering the United States (NOAA) experience with scientific response to hazardous material spills, the Norwegian scientific response to oil spills, the status of the current arrangements regarding the Great Barrier Reef Region through the National Plan to Combat Pollution of the Sea by Oil and risk analysis in the Great Barrier Reef Region. Following general discussion, the workshop participants were divided into three groups to discuss the objectives outlined in the following section. Group Chairmen presented the groups findings to the general workshop and a series of recommendations were developed, based on the group and general discussion.