

## BACKGROUND TO THIS REPORT

In July 1989 the then Prime Minister of Australia, the Rt Hon. R.J.L. Hawke MP, announced, as part of his statement on the environment (Our Country, Our Future) that the Australian Government would fund a four year environmental study of the Torres Strait marine environment. This study, later called the Torres Strait Baseline Study, was instigated in response to concerns expressed by Torres Strait Islanders, commercial fishermen and scientists, about possible effects on the marine environment of the Torres Strait from mining operations in the Fly River catchment area of Papua New Guinea.

The Baseline Study had four component programs investigating various aspects of trace metals in the Torres Strait marine environment: (1) trace metals in sediments (2) trace metals in biota (3) trace metals in seafoods commonly eaten by Torres Strait island communities, and (4) trace metals in the commercial seafood catch of the Torres Strait. The last program was undertaken by a consultant and will be reported separately.

The scientific components of the Study began with a Pilot Study in 1991-1992 designed to: (1) identify species of biota which would reflect levels of heavy metals in the Torres Strait marine environment (i.e. indicator organisms), and (2) undertake preliminary assessments of the levels of heavy metals in the biota, sediments and traditional seafoods of the Torres Strait.

The results of the Pilot Study were published in 1993<sup>1</sup> and were used to design a much broader Main Study (which was subsequently carried out in the Torres Strait in 1992-1993). A lack of funding prevented the completion of the Main Study during 1993. Funding was subsequently made available under the Strategic Initiatives Program from the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet in 1994-95, on behalf of the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, to allow for the chemical analysis of samples collected for the Main Study, and the preparation of a report on the results. This document is a report of those results.

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<sup>1</sup>Dight I. J. and Gladstone W. 1993, *Torres Strait Baseline Study: Pilot Study Final Report June 1993*, GBRMPA Research Publication No. 29. Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, Townsville.