

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Under the Australian National Plan to Combat Pollution of the Sea by Oil and various State and regional supplements, an extensive framework for oil spill response has been established. The National plan has been in effect since 1973. During that period there have been no major (on a world scale) oil spills in Australian waters. There have, however, been a number of minor spill incidents in ports and **harbours** and in coastal (territorial) waters. There have been very few incidents on the high seas.

Despite the low incidence of spills and the estimated low probability of major incidents, there is a strong case for preparedness. The Australian coastal zone and offshore waters are the focus of a wide range of uses, including fishing, **recreation**, tourism, urban and industrial development, agriculture, **aquaculture/mariculture** and conservation. Depending upon factors such as location, time, type and amount of oil spill, an incident could have significant economic and environmental consequences.

With this background, the Commonwealth Department of Transport and Communications, which is the co-ordinating agency for the National Plan, and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, which has a special interest in environmental protection, arranged for a national workshop on the role of scientific advice in oil spill response. The workshop marked an important extension to previous training efforts under the National Plan, as it was the first time that the needs and implementation of scientific response had been addressed specifically. Under the National Plan framework and the various State and regional contingency plans for oil spill response, the role of Scientific Support Co-ordinator (SSC) is identified as a major element of the overall response **organisation**.

The workshop sought to provide for the exchange of information, both between **SSC's** and with others involved in a response team, notably the leader of the combat team, the On Scene **Co-ordinator (OSC)**. ~~The workshop also reviewed the current status of scientific preparedness in the~~ context of contingency plans and provided for specialised training of **SSC's** in fields such as media relations and environmental monitoring.

Participants agreed that the workshop fulfilled an important training role, and should serve as a valuable reference point for further development of the role of SSC. Because of the limited resources available to State agencies responsible for implementation of the role of SSC, the sporadic nature of the oil spill threat and the low historical priority of scientific advice in spill response, the workshop highlighted the need for more "proactive" development of effective scientific response by State and regional **SSC agencies**. Major recommendations of the workshop directed

towards this need included:

- \* **Information** should be prepared on oil and **dispersant** toxicity and guidelines developed **for** their use under a range of conditions.
- \* There is a need to clarify and carefully evaluate the role of monitoring in **spill** response.
- \* Coastal resources atlases are an important tool and could be improved by the transfer of information to field usable micro-computer based systems.
- \* **SSC's** should articulate their abilities and concerns within a response **organisation**, particularly through improved communications with **OSCs**.
- \* There should be a follow-up workshop planned in which progress towards implementation of the recommendations of this workshop could be assessed and more selective training could be undertaken.