

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There are an estimated forty species of seabirds, over thirty species of waders and more than one hundred and fifty species of other birds found within the Great **Barrier** Reef Region.

Many of these have their breeding sites within the Region' and several migrate to the area from other parts of the world. The effects of oil on birds are generally severe often resulting in mortality. Should an oil spill of any magnitude occur on the Great Barrier Reef there is little doubt that birds and their habitats would be impacted. The workshop held on 26 February 1991 by the Authority provided a forum for oil spill response agencies, scientists, environmental groups and industry to exchange information on oiled **seabird** cleaning and rehabilitation and make recommendations on the development of a contingency plan.

Participants agreed unanimously that an oiled **seabird** contingency plan is needed for the Great Barrier Reef Region. Such a plan could have ecological as well as public relations value. The visible state of oiled birds tends to evoke a great deal of public attention and responding to this could be more important than the ecological value of assisting oiled birds.

Experience to date in Australia has indicated minimal success rates of oiled bird rehabilitation. Incidents such as the Lake **Liddell** oil spill on 18 September 1990 demonstrated the need to improve success rates by developing contingency plans, improving capture and rehabilitation procedures, developing education programs and establishing species priority.

It was agreed that a contingency plan should be expanded to include other wildlife such as dolphins, dugongs, and turtles i.e. an oiled wildlife contingency plan should be developed as opposed to one specifically for seabirds. Emphasis was given to the ethics of wildlife preservation. In-depth debates **centred** on the basis of selective care. Some participants supported primary selection being given to the rare and threatened species while others felt that species of ecological importance to the damaged habitat should receive priority.

The Queensland Department of Environment and Heritage was unanimously nominated as the primary body responsible for developing and implementing the contingency plan, with the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority and other agencies providing support. It was stressed that funding should be provided by the oil and shipping industries through the Australian Maritime Safety Authority and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority.

Participants delegated secondary responsibilities to a wide variety of organisations and agencies. As a result it was determined that all areas of society could play a role in an oiled wildlife contingency plan.

It was agreed that further research is needed to enhance the success of oiled wildlife response. A list of research needs was recommended by the workshop. This list includes:

- studies on survival rates;
- studies on species importance in order to establish the species that require priority attention; and
- further research and development of methods and technology.

The results of the Oiled **Seabird** Cleaning and Rehabilitation Workshop helped to establish a clear framework for an oiled wildlife contingency plan. It is hoped that the recommendations of the Workshop will be implemented.