Media Release

New species found in Ningaloo's deep waters

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More than 600 marine species have been reported in the first study of deep water species living off Western Australia's Ningaloo reef. More than 50 are likely to be new to science.

The Ningaloo deeper water biodiversity project, which will provide a baseline for future monitoring in offshore areas of Ningaloo Marine Park, is being led by the Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS) in collaboration with the Western Australian Museum, Curtin University and the University of Western Australia on behalf of the Western Australian Marine Science Institution (WAMSI).

The implications of this new knowledge from Ningaloo work and other current marine studies will be discussed at WAMSI's *Monitoring for Action: understanding Western Australia's changing marine and coastal environments* symposium at the Western Australian Museum – Maritime, today.

The WA Museum's senior curator, Dr Jane Fromont, said the Ningaloo discoveries included 18 new sea stars and sea urchins, three mollusc species and more than 50 new sponge species.

"The Ningaloo discoveries show us that this State is megadiverse and that monitoring is critical for protecting this biodiversity," she said.

AIMS research scientist and the projects principal investigator, Dr Andrew Heyward, said the studies provided baseline data on species, their distributions and their habitats.

"We need this information to help fine tune existing management approaches, set the scene for future monitoring and test how well those management arrangements are working at Ningaloo," he said.

He added most of the research carried out by scientific divers was in depths of less than 20 metres "but many areas of Ningaloo Marine Park and other coastal waters are deeper than that.

"There's a huge knowledge gap in the depth zone between where divers routinely work and traditional deep sea research from ships. We're finding that this zone – between 30 and 100 metres deep – can be very rich in terms of biodiversity, and at Ningaloo is likely to play a key role in coupling the offshore and coastal habitats," he said.

WAMSI Chief Executive Officer Dr Steve Blake said WA's marine environment had a wealth of marine biodiversity, unique habitats, abundant resources and many social values but it needed to be mapped and managed to enable informed decision-making.

“We need to know what is the current biodiversity and how is it likely to change over time,” he said.

“To answer these questions we have to understand what is there and undertake a program of scientific monitoring.

“This *Monitoring for Action* symposium will outline what we’re doing today and how decisions of the future can be better informed by well conceived marine and coastal monitoring programs,” he said.

Initial scientific findings into the effects of reduced Leeuwin Current flows, rising sea temperatures, oceanography and biodiversity in the wake of climate change, and unprecedented industry, aquaculture and coastal developments would be canvassed at the symposium.

WA Museum Acting Chief Executive Officer, Ms Diana Jones, will officially open the proceedings at 8.30am.

Speakers include representatives from private industry, the Rottnest Island Authority, State Government agencies, AIMS, the Cockburn Sound Management Council, UWA, CSIRO and the State Natural Resource Management Group.

Ends

Please attend the symposium’s official opening, introduction and keynote address at 8.30am after which Drs Fromont and Heyward will be available for interview. Marine sponge samples, video footage and maps will be available for media use.

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