

NEWSLETTER

No. 3 September 2007

SEADRAGON FOUNDATION INC.

www.seadragonfoundation.org



Welcome to our Newsletter and thank you for joining
Seadragon Foundation Inc (SFI)

We hope you will enjoy the experience of supporting the sustainable management of the Leafy Seadragon through a new type of environmental organisation. The SFI is an organisation being tailored for the conservation challenges of the 21st century.

Thanks to EcoVoice for featuring a story on the Seadragon Foundation Inc. in their September Edition www.ecovoice.com.au

Two important events concerning climate change

Free Climate Change Public Forum – 7:15pm Wednesday September 19 at Norwood Town Hall.

Walk Against Warming – Sunday 2 weeks before the 2007 Federal Election – let's see if we can help make this event enormous! Details www.walkagainstawarming.org.

The SFI thanks Karen Whitford for producing and emailing this newsletter

SEADRAGON FOUNDATION REPORT

Robert Browne

The membership of the Seadragon Foundation Inc. (SFI) is continuing to grow and we almost have the 50 members needed to being able to register with Environment Australia as a tax exempt Environmental Charity. Environment Australia has agreed that up to 50% of our member required for registration can be overseas Australians or foreign nationals. That's good because 20% of our membership is in those categories.

Because of suggestions by James Brook a major contributor to the very successful sister group "Reefwatch" and now SFI Member we have introduced a Family Membership. A membership base has also widened in range to include more children and a wider range of overseas members.

Our engagement with the blue groper conservation has resulted in a letter to be sent to the government to request full protection of this species and another large reef fish that has been declining the harlequin fish *Othos dentex*. The development of a close inshore conservation diving site at Normanville is raising local interest and there are plans to develop signage and other amenities.

Our branding SuFI SEADRAGON is being presented for our younger members as an adventure character through fictitious emails at "SuFI News".

The "Conservation Guide" for the proposed BHP Billiton Desalination Plant has been presented to the chair of the Chair of the Desalination Working Group, and a range of politicians. This guide can be found in our publication list "No 1 September 2007, Spencer Desal. Plant. Conserv. Guide" www.seadragonfoundation.org/SFI%20Articles/Publications.htm

The issue of sea level rise has received some publicity of late. However, this issue is speculative and even if sea level rise from melting ice occurs it will not be substantial for probably thirty years or for up to sixty years. Consequently the SFI will continue to focus on the immediate challenges for marine conservation in southern Australia.

A very important process was initiated this month, the direct involvement of SFI members in the formation of the SFI. Three issues are presented, the development of the character of SuFI through emails, endorsement by the SFI of the protection of the blue groper, and our categorisation of overseas members. Have a look and have your say.

The SFI is continuing to develop its publicity. Articles referring to the SFI are increasingly appearing in a range of publications. This month we have an article in EcoVoice which is one of the premier environmental magazines in Australia (www.ecovoice.com.au). We have also developed a reciprocal emailing of newsletters with the Marine Life Society of South Australia, and Friends of Gulf St Vincent. We plan to soon publicise in the MCCN Newsletter and so should soon have national recognition.

Cheers Robert

LEAFY SEADRAGON HABITAT THREATENED

MLSSA seeks the endorsement by the SFI of a letter to ask for full protection of the blue groper and harlequin fish. These two large fish species help maintain Leafy seadragon, seahorse and pipefish habitat.



Last newsletter we had an article about the protection of the western blue groper (*Achoerodus gouldii*). The Marine Life Society of South Australia (MLSSA) are having a go at getting full protection for the groper and the harlequin fish *Othos dentex*. The harlequin fish is a South Australian reef fish in if anything a more precarious position than the blue groper. By the way if you look up the web don't get confused as there are a plethora of fishes with the common name Harlequin fishes and some are aquarium fish.

A harlequin fish *Othox dentax* at a depth of 10 m, Snug Cove, Kangaroo Island, South Australia, November 1989. Photo David Muirhead.

The full letter can be read on our publications list at <http://www.seadragonfoundation.org/SFI%20Articles/Publications.htm>. We have offered conditional support for this (as per article), so have a look and if you have any reservations about us giving official endorsement or comments send Karen our Secretary an email.

Below is the letter from MLSSA.

"Hi Folks,

This is the final edition of the letter, composed after much consultation, asking for the complete protection of the Western Blue Groper and the Harlequin Fish. Thank you to all who assisted in its creation.

If your group supports the letter then please let me know by the first of October. This should give everybody time to consult their memberships. If you do not reply by then I will remove your groups name from the letter.

Only minor grammatical or spelling changes will be considered at this time. The content will not be changed materially unless there are factual errors.

Philip Hall

(President MLSSA)"

WEB NEWS AND MEMBERSHIP NEWS

Karen Whitford

Our website www.seadragonfoundation.org had 182 visits on average for August and 1383 hits on average for August, compared to July 1047 hits.

The www.seadragonfoundation.org site still hasn't had its final style established. We are waiting to see how the SFI develops and what the web needs are. As well as the SFI site we have two other sites. We have large photo galleries of fish and South Australian coastal scenery on the Inshore Fish Group <http://www.ifg.bioteck.org/photogallery.htm> site and of numerous amphibians and reptiles and other animals, and USA scenery on our bioteck site <http://www.bioteck.org/Photogallery/Photogallery.htm>. If you have any photos or ideas for the newsletter please let me know and I will add them into the newsletter.

We welcome Joel Weber our third USA Full Member. Joel who lives in Memphis, Tennessee, is one of the most adaptable carers for animals that you could ever meet. Joel has had a wide experience in keeping aquarium fish and has improved the captive husbandry of endangered cichlids and was the first to breed an endangered salamander. His professional experience with fish extends from work in large zoos to running a successful aquarium based business. Joel never misses an opportunity to care for homeless or mistreated animals, particularly amphibians, birds and tortoises. However, he recently found caring owners for 30 homeless Australian sugar gliders.

THE SFI NEEDS MORE MEMBERS TO ENGAGE ACTIVITIES LIKE ESTABLISHING FAMILY CONSERVATION DIVE SITES, PROTECT LEAFY SEADRAGON REEF HABITAT, AND TO MAINTAIN AND DEVELOP OUR EDUCATION AND WEB RESOURCES.

The logo for SuFI Seadragon features the text 'SuFI Seadragon' in a bold, sans-serif font. Each letter is a different color: 'S' is purple, 'u' is red, 'F' is orange, 'I' is yellow, 'S' is green, 'e' is blue, 'a' is light blue, 'd' is dark blue, 'r' is purple, 'a' is red, 'g' is orange, 'o' is yellow, 'n' is green. The text is set against a background of wavy, horizontal lines in shades of blue and purple, suggesting water or a seadragon's tail.

Our new member SuFI SEADRAGON has agreed to be the Seadragon Foundation model. This is our correspondence with SuFI.

Sent: Thursday, 2 August 2007 1:36 AM
To: SuFI SEADRAGON
Subject: Jasmine Stewart Hello
Email: seadragonfoundation@gmail.com

Dear SuFI

We have formed a new group in your area – Seadragon Foundation to protect the marine environment and we would very much like to have you as a friend and join our group. Could you tell us about yourself and your home. We would like to visit you and your friends someday, and would like you to come and stay with us. Would you be the model for the SFI?

Sincerely

Jasmine Stewart (Publicity, Seadragon Foundation Inc.)

Received: Saturday, 4 August 2007 12:36 PM
To: Jasmine Stewart Seadragon Foundation Inc.
Subject: SuFI Hello
Email: [REDACTED]@[REDACTED]

Dear Jasmine

I am happy to have you as a web friend and will join the Seadragon Foundation and be the SFI model.

Please don't give my email address to anybody as it is private. There are sharks out there, I don't want to talk to them, and they might find where I live and eat me up.

I live in a wonderful underwater garden just off the South Australian coast surrounded by my friends. You will always be welcome.

I love having many friends, but I also like to spend time alone listening to the sounds of the sea, reading and learning, and thinking about things. Often I drift through my underwater cathedral with a carpet of pretty shells under the kelps. Sometimes close along the reefy outcrops draped in algae. My friends the sawtooths live behind an urchin or under a ledge in the caverns. Bluey my best friend lives in the biggest cavern.

Bluey spends most of his time looking after his family and protecting the reef. Bluey is very old and wise and helps me with my studies. Bluey knows all about the reef and is always there to help me if the spiny sea urchin gang comes calling. They can't see properly and flounder about like a fish out of water, and eat everything in sight and make a real mess.

I have lots of relatives the seadragons, seahorses and pipefish. However, both Bluey and I now enjoy the company of divers when they descend under a cloud of bubbles. At first I was scared but Bluey swam straight up to the divers. They gave him an urchin his favorite food.

Bluey is in the hospital cave now. He saw a big piece of floating abalone. He didn't notice the fishers hook and just couldn't help gobbling it up. Suddenly he was yanked toward the surface but then broke away. His mouth is all sore but he is looked after well and will be back soon. I love Bluey and visit him every day. I have been taking him soft food in hospital, mainly sea urchins out of the shell.

The sea urchins are the only ones happy that Bluey is gone and are rattling their spines for joy. I have to go! Here come the sea urchins again to eat my underwater garden. Huh! I will turn them into Bluey food; I hope they don't eat too much! Please visit soon. We could have a feast of baby crab with seaweed and fish lice with rice.

Love SuFI xxx

CANVASSING SFI MEMBERSHIP OPINION ON SuFI

The SuFI story character was sent to ten SFI members for their opinion. Because of the positive response from five members, and neutral response from one, the SFI will continue developing the concept. The idea to appropriate SuFI into a more open habitat than a cavern was adopted. In the original document we had SuFI's primary abode as a cavern.

I have removed names from responses in respect to privacy. This is an issue that we should discuss later. Next time we will ask for specification if people don't mind names on correspondence!?

PROJECT, SuFI characterisation.

"From SFI, Hi Guys

You have been selected from the SFI membership for your opinion on an SFI proposed activity. Your comments - if you decide to reply - will be appreciated and kept in confidence. Please also indicate if you do not want these sort of emails.

We are considering developing SuFI our branding, as an adventure character for the newsletter with emails for parents if they desire to read to young children. SuFI is a late teenager, and older sister!! I have attached a word doc with a proposed introduction to SuFI. Could you email your comments both positive and negative. Maybe its too long, too violent, wrong emotions, discriminatory, or language wrong for its character etc."

RESPONSES

Frits, Yankalilla I rather like the Sufi story. I wonder if I can get YAS (Yankalilla Area School) to participate. Maybe a project for children to write Sufi stories? Anything to get publicity I suppose.

Lydia, Melbourne BEAUTIFUL - this would make a lovely read for children - and is descriptive and evocative of a haven under the sea. Go SuFI! :-)

I am Lydia Fucsko and my comment re: SUFI is of a fairly personal nature because I am naturally quite personal(able) :-) Go Sufi Go Sufi Go Sufi!

Anonymous Hi there! [REDACTED] loved the email. She wanted to know where they lived and wanted to know what they looked like and made fun of turning the urchins into "Bluey Food". Now she tells [REDACTED] if he doesn't behave he will get turned into Bluey Food.... HA! She wanted to know more and was interested. [REDACTED] was oblivious and ran around like a crazy man. Thanks!

David, Brighton Re SuFI draft-I like it a lot. I have no criticisms other than this probably petty one : the concept of living in a cavern worries me a bit as to my knowledge LSD's don't enter caverns much if at all(and of our syngnathids, only sawtooth pipefish seem to occupy caverns or similar nooks and crannies) so this concept might send the wrong message re preferred habitat. I suppose it could be modified to incorporate cavern(s) as backdrop to SuFI's 'station' eg by saying SuFI drifts around in close proximity to reefy outcrops draped in algae and containing charming little caverns where shy friends the sawtooth couple live behind an urchin under a ledge or in a cavern or some such idea. But I'll have to defer to you, who set the main SuFI text, which I'll say again is very appealing.

Kevin, Perth I have made some suggestions. I think it would be best to use images that give an idea of seadragon life as much as possible. Nemo may be tropical but SuFI isn't. Ed: Kevin returned the document with the proposed corrections and improvements.

Karen, Adelaide I have read the SuFI newsletter, I am not sure on it, I really don't know what to say about it, can I be neutral and say you go ahead with it

James, Normanville Well done

STATUS OF OVERSEAS AUSTRALIAN AND FOREIGN NATIONAL MEMBERS

In anticipation of our registration as a not for profit tax exempt Environmental Charity we have been questioning Environment Australia of the status of our overseas members.

EA's reply:

"I recently raised with the Commonwealth Department of the Environment and Water Resources the issue of an increasing number of overseas members might have on SFI's deductible gift recipient (DGR) status. The Department advised that, in order to retain DGR status, the majority (ie. more than 51%) of SFI's members must be Australian citizens who are permanently living in Australia. SFI members have to be financial (ie membership fees are up to date) and able to vote at an annual general meeting. The Department will accept SFI's overseas members in the meeting of the 50 minimum member requirement as long as they are in a minority."

EA was concerned that foreign nationals might present anathematic ideas to the SFI. These could result in distraction of the SFI from the SFI objects and purposes. The following is a proposed policy to be included in the SFI by laws. What do you think?

"Members of the SFI should avoid presenting ideas or values contradictory to Australian norms for environmental organisations for consideration of inclusion within the policy or practices of the Seadragon Foundation Inc. Any such proposal presented to the SFI Management Panel will have valid reasons for its rejection formally sent to the proposer(s) and all details recorded in the minutes of the SFI. For foreign nationals or overseas Australian nationals there will not be any recourse to objection under - Dispute resolution, Rule 11.2, between a member and the Association – for rejection by the SFI of ideas or values considered by the Management Panel as contradictory to Australian norms for environmental organizations."

INSHORE FISH DISCOVERIES 2003 - 2007

Robert Browne

This article was also printed in the September edition of EcoVoice and the August Southern Ocean Divers Newsletter.

Recent discoveries have shown that the southern coast of Australia holds a Seadragons treasure of unknown biodiversity. South Australia was once a world leader in the publication of advanced books on inshore fish. Unfortunately, then there was a gap until recently with no studies or discoveries of consequence. However, there is now a renaissance of inshore biological discovery. This renaissance is being driven by a growing need for engagement with our marine environment supported by new technologies like digital imaging and the www. Eventually with the discovery of one tiny bright green fish and leading to the Seadragon Foundation it started at the beginning of the third millennium.

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In 2003 we were snorkeling south Hallett Cove looking for fish. My dive buddy SFI member Peter Cullen held up his hand net and said “What do you think this is”. Inside was a tiny bright green fish. It was a species from Western Australia that was not recorded for the state. This got us thinking, just how much is known about inshore fish in South Australia. From then on we spent a considerable amount of time netting fish in the shallows. I decided to focus on the syngnathids - the seadragons, seahorses and pipefish – because so little was known about them and they are so fascinating. Syngnathid refers to their fused snout with a bellows like mechanism for sucking in small mysid crustaceans and other plankton. Syngnathids also have bone rings, which make them dry without much shrinkage.

Investigation of the South Australian Museum specimens showed a pipefish species that had been unrecognized since 1981 when SCUBA divers discovered the first specimen. It was clearly a new species and could be recognized solely by its superficial appearance. I was then lucky to meet current SFI member Kevin Smith who was at the time active with Reef Watch. Kevin looked for the new species at the locations mentioned on the old museum bottles and there they were swimming around and breeding just offshore. Kevin's efforts soon discovered some new sites and surprisingly one at Seacliff.

We called the new species, the southern gulf pipefish (*Stigmatopora narinosa*; Browne and Smith 2007). Even after four years looking the southern gulf pipefish has only been found in the two South Australian Gulfs; Gulf St Vincent at Seacliff, and from Pt. Vincent to Edithburg, and in Spencer Gulf from Port Turton to Pt Hughes. This very small distribution makes the southern gulf pipefish one of the most restricted syngnathid and marine fish in the world. Any images of the southern gulf pipefish in other areas would be extremely valuable.



Southern gulf pipefish (*Stigmatopora narinosa*) showing the distinctive saddle shaped markings and broad and deep snout. Like all *Stigmatopora* species the southern gulf pipefish has a long thin prehensile tail. Image by Kevin Smith.

Surprisingly, the second new type of pipefish we are working on, which we are optimistically calling *Stigmatopora* sp. 1., is in the same genera, *Stigmatopora*, as the southern gulf pipefish. The *Stigmatopora* are a very interesting pipefish as they are only found in southern Australia and New

Zealand, are a unique group of high taxonomic status, and have thin prehensile tails. The tails are so fragile that often the tips are broken. SFI member David Muirhead has taken numerous images of this delicate but beautiful pipefish.

This type *Stigmatopora* sp. 1. – we call it a type until we publish its description as a species – has only been found on the eastern side of Gulf St Vincent. *Stigmatopora* sp. 1. first came to our attention when Kevin Smith found a very small *Stigmatopora* that had a brood of 64. Besides the difference in color and conformity this number of eggs makes this very likely that this is a new species. The only two previously named *Stigmatopora* species both brood many less eggs about 20 for the similar sized widebody pipefish (*S. nigra*) and about 40 for the much larger spotted pipefish (*S. argus*). Unlike the southern gulf pipefish this species is quite hard to find and even in its known habitat of inshore dispersed seagrass and macroalgae only one or two a dive may be seen.



A possible new species of *Stigmatopora* (*Stigmatopora* sp 1) photographed at Normanville Beach. Image by David Muirhead.

Michael Hammer has been working on inshore fish. Michael is among many other things an expert in gobies. Michael was aware of the importance of biodiversity surveys and the

limited knowledge of inshore fish. For a comparison with the syngnathids Mike did a short biodiversity survey for marine gobies in the Port River, and found four unrecorded species, three of which were new to South Australia. This was in the port of the capital city and in an area that had undergone many marine biodiversity surveys (Hammer 2006). This really reinforced our growing belief that the current knowledge of inshore fish is very poor in South Australia. The search for these fish with cameras is a great way for conservation divers to directly help biodiversity surveys.

Another interesting discovery with pipefish was by David Muirhead and Kevin Smith at Normanville Beach. There are two species of pipefish in the *Histiogamphelus* genera and little was known about either. One was recorded from across southern Australia but the other only as far west as the Robe, South Australia. Both species were found to inhabit close inshore areas over sand and often together. The presence of these species close inshore offers a chance for families to easily see them even when snorkeling.



The first southern pygmy pipehorse (*Acentronura australe*) recorded since 1921. Image Steve Leske.

Another surprise was in 2007 when an image of a small pretty syngnathid appeared on emails from Steve Leske asking for any information. The image was of a southern pygmy pipehorse (*Acentronura australe*).

This was pretty amazing as this species had not been recorded in its marine environment before in South Australia. In fact since 1921 when some were dredged off Cape Jervis they were none captured until a few were recently netted. We had also had a pygmy pipefish alert out with the diver since 2003 as we knew the pygmy was a prize find.

If you have any images of syngnathids that need identification or you think are of interest please send to robert.browne@gmail.com who will reply as soon as possible.

Hurrah!! Marine Parks

An extensive network of marine parks will soon be established in South Australia. Any thoughts about the possibilities and pitfalls of marine parks would contribute to the optimization of marine parks.

Below is a news release inviting community input by the SA Department for Environment and Heritage. It is important that the Seadragon Foundation has a substantial input to the marine parks process. The seadragons and their relatives are the most threatened of marine fish and have their specific needs. In particular because of our rapidly growing SFI group in the Fluerieu Peninsula decisions concerning marine parks in this region could affect initiatives by the SFI for eco tourism and conservation diving.

News Release, SA Department for Environment and Heritage (DEH)

29 August 2007

Marine Parks consultations to discuss boundaries

The SA Department for Environment and Heritage (DEH) will consult extensively with coastal communities before the boundaries and zones defining the State's 19 marine parks are finalised.

"In coming months we will continue formal and informal consultations with a wide range of stakeholders, including local government representatives, recreational and professional fishers, aquaculture operators, NRM Boards and tourism interests," said Mr Chris Thomas, DEH's Acting Manager, Coast and Marine Conservation.

The Marine Parks Bill, which is expected to be passed by the SA Parliament early in 2008, will empower DEH to develop draft boundaries to discuss in detail with the community before they are finalised.

"All stakeholders will have opportunities to express their views and consult with DEH before the marine park boundaries are finalised," Mr Thomas said.



The achievement of sustainable management of our inshore environments will require a delicate balance between competing demands" Image Robert Browne.

A second round of formal community consultation will occur before any proposed management zones, including “no-take” zones, are developed.

“A third round of formal community consultation will occur before any management zones, including ‘no-take’ zones, are finalised.

In South Australia, “no-take” zones will comprise only a small proportion of the total area of each marine park, in line with the Government’s commitment to provide genuine multiple-use parks.

“This is a completely different process to the way the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park was established,” he said.

“In fact, as the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park is itself six times the size of the whole of SA’s State waters, comparing the two is like comparing Port Lincoln and New York.

“However, until there are draft lines on a map to evaluate and discuss with stakeholders, it is not useful to discuss the economic impacts (both positive and negative) that marine parks might have,” Mr Thomas said.

More information on SA’s marine parks can be found on the DEH website at:
<http://www.environment.sa.gov.au/coasts/index.html>