

## From the Tide to Table OceanWatch Australia

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<sup>1</sup> OceanWatch Australia, Sydney Fish Market, Pyrmont, NSW 2009

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**Abstract** OceanWatch Australia's Tide to Table program was established in 2004 to reinforce the message that actions on land affect our waterways and estuaries, which in turn affects the quality and kind of seafood that is presented on our dinner table. OceanWatch Australia has recently established a new Tide to Table position in Moreton Bay, QLD which focuses on providing opportunities for community, industry and agency participation and collaboration in on-ground solutions to improve water quality and fish habitat. The Tide to Table program's success is due to its ability to involve local farmers, seafood producers, businesses, communities and government agencies in a common cause; to rehabilitate a river system or estuary and improve its water quality, fish and seafood habitat and rebuild the health of the immediate environment. All marine life needs healthy rivers and estuaries including saltmarsh, mangroves and seagrass, to thrive, breed and shelter. Water quality is critical in fish and shellfish harvest areas for the supply of sustainable crabs, prawns and other seafood. Tide to Table focuses on involving local people, including the seafood industry in Natural Resource Management. Depending on the objective a market based approach is applied to deliver funding on-ground using local groups. Just as important are a range of behavior change activities that are undertaken to communicate the messages behind the on-ground work. So far OceanWatch Australia has run 12 successful Tide to Table programs in New South Wales and 4 programs in Queensland.

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### INTRODUCTION

OceanWatch Australia Ltd is a national not-for-profit environmental organisation that works to advance sustainability in the Australian seafood industry. OceanWatch's key activities involve:

- enhancing fish habitats and improving water quality in estuaries and coastal environments;
- working with industry and local communities to minimise environmental impacts;
- introducing industry and communities to sustainable technologies and behaviours.

To achieve these positive outcomes, OceanWatch Australia works in partnership with the Australian seafood industry, federal and state governments, natural resource managers, private enterprise and local communities.

OceanWatch Australia, with its close relationship to the seafood industry is able to fill a much needed gap to promote and increase the uptake of sustainable technologies and behaviours and promote collaboration with other partners such as government agencies. Legislative agencies and commercial fishers are not known to have the most open relationship. OceanWatch Australia strives to make sure both sides are working towards a common goal.

The OceanWatch Australia Tide to Table program is a successful Natural Resource Management (NRM) model piloted in Sydney 7 years ago and adopted to Queensland. The program focuses on fish habitat and water quality improvements, all requirements of healthy seafood. Its success revolves around funding on-ground action and behavior change activities while involving local landholders, farmers, the seafood sector and governments.

The new round called Tide to Table Queensland, funded by the Australian Government's Caring for our Country program, strives to highlight the importance of on-ground activities in the catchment that impact on estuarine wetlands and water quality and have a flow on effect to the productivity of the seafood industry. Without the necessary clean water and aquatic habitats such as saltmarsh, mangroves and seagrass, there will be no seafood!

## **METHODS**

This program incorporates a 3 pronged approach to delivering priority targets identified by the Australian Government. It funds onground works, fosters partnerships to engage with and increase involvement of coastal community groups in onground works, and capitalises on industry, production groups and stakeholder partnerships to increase participation in NRM, raise awareness and bring about change in user behaviour.

### **On-ground Works**

The on-ground works component will include a devolved grants program, multiple marine debris cleanups and introducing a discarded fishing line collection program in Moreton Bay. The objectives of the devolved grants program are:

- To accelerate on-ground environmental works that will lead to better water quality & improved fish habitat in Moreton Bay, specifically areas contained in, drain into or are adjacent to declared Fish Habitat Areas (FHAs).
- To foster ongoing partnerships between landholders, community groups, regional NRM bodies, recreational and commercial fishers and state and local government to protect and rehabilitate declared FHAs in Moreton Bay.
- To implement on-ground works in marine and coastal environments to reduce impacts of habitat destruction, erosion, unmanaged access, loss of biodiversity, degradation of Indigenous sea cultural heritage values and rubbish dumping.

OceanWatch Australia is accepting project proposals until September 16<sup>th</sup>, 2011. Examples of projects that could meet the key objectives are:

- Seagrass friendly moorings in Moreton Bay
- Marine debris cleanups and flood impact monitoring at Peel Island and Myora – Amity Banks
- Weed control and follow-up revegetative works to protect and enhance priority fish habitats
- Riverbank stabilization within or adjacent to declared FHAs
- Caboolture River fish barrier removal
- Enhancing riparian buffers and protection of land that contribute to stormwater treatment within the catchment.

### **Community Engagement**

A range of community engagement activities are planned for this program and include;

- Connectivity tours - exploring links in the landscape and impacts of management upstream on local seafood industry. Connectivity tours utilise speakers with expertise in fisheries related topics and provide opportunities for learning, networking and forming partnership approaches to implementing projects.
- Seafood festivals, community events, and environment celebration days (such as World Wetlands Day) - taking the opportunity to raise wider community awareness and engage new participants. Project Managers will work in partnership with other NRM stakeholders to maintain a strong presence at a minimum of 3 public community events each. Presence and engagement at public community events provide potential to raise wider community awareness.
- Capacity building workshops - targeting local govt on culvert designs for coastal environments (to maintain connectivity for fish passage), and coastal rehab practices, to build skill base of community groups, local govt, and Indigenous,
- Onground works suitable for Green Army and CVA involvement,
- GEOCACHE initiative - educational orienteering and waypointing program popular with Duke of Ed, scouts, other youth group affiliates.

## **EXAMPLES FROM PAST TIDE TO TABLE PROJECTS**

Past Tide to Table projects have been focused in the Sydney, Hunter and Hawksbery catchments in NSW and Burnett Mary and Burdekin Dry Tropics in Queensland. These projects have included:

- Marine Habitat and Storm Water Quality Protection Program – River Heads
- Fish Habitat Rehabilitation and Protection – Euleilah Creek
- Marine Debris & Crab-pot Clean Ups – Burnett River & Mary River
- Catchment to Coast Tour – Burnett Mary Region
- Heales Road Crossing Retrofitting for Fish Passage – Splitters Creek
- Pulgul Creek Rehabilitation Plan – Pulgul Creek
- Weed Choke Removal – Splitters Creek
- Weed management within saltmarsh and wetlands
- Cleanup of derelict asbestos Oyster Industry materials from National Park reserve
- Oyster harvest area protection signage to reinforce the importance of using effluent pump out facilities for boats
- Replacement of five traditional moorings with seagrass friendly units in Pittwater
- Development of an Environmental Management System with Broken Bay Oysters

## **DISCUSSION**

The start of the Queensland Tide to Table program in Moreton Bay has been full speed ahead since the hiring of our Project Officer in Moreton Bay at the end of June 2011. The project officer has launched the “improving coastal hotspots” project in Moreton Bay.

The main ecological objective of the program is to improve water quality and fish habitat and its success revolves around funding on-ground actions and behaviour change activities that involve local landholders, farmers, the seafood sector and government agencies. OceanWatch Australia, through funding from the Australian Government’s Caring for our Country program, is implementing a devolved grants program to attract proposals from community, industry and government groups to perform on-ground works to improve water quality and fish habitat.

Spring has started really well for South East Queensland and Moreton Bay. September 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> saw the Hays Inlet Marine Debris Cleanup in Griffin coincide with beautiful weather and a midday high tide to allow volunteers access to the cleanup site in the mangroves. This two day operation involved 15 groups that donated their time, expertise, resources and determination to get the job done. 6 local and state government agencies including Maritime Safety Queensland, QLD Fisheries, QLD Boating and Fisheries Patrol, the Moreton Bay Marine Park, Moreton Bay Regional Council and the Department of Environment and Resource Management; 6 environmental groups including Conservation Volunteers Australia, the Redcliffe Environmental Forum, Pine Rivers Catchment Association, SEQ Catchments, WetlandCare Australia and the Osprey House Environmental Centre; and 3 industry groups including the Moreton Bay Seafood Industry Association, Samies Girl Seafood Market and Colliers Crane Hire made the operation an incredible success.

With such a great turnout, our volunteers were able to remove over 7 tonnes of debris from a stretch of mangroves less than 2kms long! Much of the large debris was left over from January’s floods and included 3 pontoons, 3 refrigerators, numerous tyres and other large debris you would never expect to see in the mangroves. A total of 127 bags of rubbish were collected on the Friday by volunteers and we filled three large trucks donated by the Moreton Bay Regional Council.

## **TAKE HOME MESSAGES**

The Tide to Table Queensland program and specifically the “Improving Coastal Hotspots in Moreton Bay” project will work with all user groups to improve water quality and fish habitat in

Moreton Bay and its catchments. The linkage between the upper, middle and lower catchments and their impact on the Bay is well established; however, the connection must be made how the health of the catchment impacts the quality and sustainability of our local seafood industry. Australians' want to support local businesses and eat local produce but we need to work across the catchment to ensure the longevity and sustainability of our fisheries.