

Managing offshore industry and environment

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THE North West Shelf Joint Environmental Management Study (NWSJEMS) aimed at improving environmental and economic management of Australia's marine ecosystems, was launched in Perth yesterday.

The study, jointly funded by the Western Australian Government and the CSIRO, will provide practical tools for planners and could impact industries such as petroleum and shipping. The science developed as a result of the study is already being used on projects in WA's Ningaloo Marine Park and south eastern Australia.

NWSJEMS project leader Scott Condie said the research was vital because coasts and oceans worldwide are being exposed to growing pressure from increasing industrialisation and population.

"Our team developed a sophisticated model that allows users to envisage different development scenarios and management options, and comprehensively evaluate their potential impacts on marine ecosystems," he said.

"The study found that the North West Shelf environment is in good condition, but will need to be carefully managed to cope with the current industrial expansion.

"NWSJEMS provides the scientific tools to enable this. The sophisticated techniques developed from this study are being further improved and can be adapted for any marine ecosystem facing pressures from potentially competing uses."

Federal Minister for Science and Research Kim Carr, who was at the launch, said the study was a good example of the importance of collaboration and how major national challenges can be tackled.

"The study delivers real tools for planners to tackle the complex issue of managing the impacts of multiple human activities on the Australian marine and coastal environment so as to reap social and economic benefits, while maintaining environmental integrity," he said.

"The project is a powerful example of how collaborations between Federal and State agencies, working hand-in-hand with industry, the community and local government, can develop innovative approaches to our major national challenges."

The \$7.7 million study was jointly funded by the WA Government and CSIRO's Wealth from Oceans National Research Flagship.



Pink coral, photo courtesy of CSIRO



A Pilbara river and mangroves, photo courtesy of CSIRO

Woodside funding reef study

Woodside Energy is funding a baseline environmental study of Scott Reef, off Western Australia's Kimberley coast, which will be carried out by the Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS).

The study, which will cost at least \$25 million over four years, will provide a comprehensive understanding of biodiversity, oceanography and ecosystems on and around Scott Reef.

AIMS CEO Dr Ian Poiner said: "Australia is largely a marine nation and our coast and oceans contribute enormously to our identity and wealth. Despite this, much of Australia's ocean territory remains unexplored and poorly understood and this is especially true for northern and north-west Australia."

Marine ecosystems face a number of threats including the impacts of global warming due to enhanced greenhouse effect. Marine environmental issues associated with coastal and offshore development require independent scientific advice to help inform policy, management and industry decisions, AIMS said.