

# SeaNet – an environmental extension service for the Australian seafood industry

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## Duncan Leadbitter

*Program Manager*

*Locked Bag 247*

*Pymont NSW 2009*

*Phone: 02 9660 9969*

*Fax: 02 9552 3574*

*E-mail: oceanwch@geko.net.au*

## “SeaNet” in brief

The National Heritage Trust has granted funding to a consortium comprising the Australian Seafood Industry Council, the Australian Marine Conservation Society and Ocean Watch Australia to enable the establishment of an extension service (known as SeaNet) to promote sustainable fishing practices within the Australian seafood industry. This consortium is known as the Fisheries Extension Network Australia (FENA).

## Aims of SeaNet

In pursuing its goal of facilitating the move to ecologically sustainable fisheries, SeaNet aims to achieve the following:

- increase the rate of uptake of new fishing gears and practices to aid bycatch reduction and environmental best practice;
- increase the rate of transfer of research-generated knowledge about new fishing gears and practices;
- facilitate liaison between members of the fishing fraternity (fishers, researchers, managers etc) on fisheries sustainability matters; and
- provide information, support and advice to

fishers and others seeking to make changes to their fishing gear and/or fishing practices.

## Basis for SeaNet

In the agricultural sector there has been a long (decades) history of making research available to farmers via formal extension programs. With the exception of some project-related exercises the same approach has not been taken in the fisheries sector. However, these project-related exercises have demonstrated the value of a focus on extension.

The need for extension has been highlighted in the FRDC Corporate Plan, the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Aquaculture Research Priorities and the draft National Policy on Bycatch.

SeaNet borrows from a number of existing and successful entities, namely:

- the US Sea Grant Extension Service;
- the Australian Marine and Coastal Community Network; and
- the Australian National Landcare Program and ethos.

The model we adopted was also influenced by feedback from researchers and fishers who agreed that such a service was timely, if not overdue.

### **How will SeaNet operate?**

The level of funding made available (A\$700,000) will enable the employment of extension officers over the funding period (two years). These extension officers will be employed by Ocean Watch Australia but will be hosted by a fishing industry body under a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). Guidance will be provided by a steering committee comprising representatives of ASIC, AMCS, Ocean Watch and invited participants.

### **Current status**

At present a contract has being signed on the basis of a discussion paper which outlined the structure and operational aspects of SeaNet. Currently, employees are being recruited, expressions of interest from industry associations have been sought, MoUs will be written and a business plan prepared.

### **The long-term view**

The applicants view SeaNet not as a project but as a service that will have a longer life than the two-year Natural Heritage Trust funding period. We also aim to expand the service so that more fisheries can have the benefit of the extension officers.