

News

51st Annual Meeting of the Association for Tropical Biology and Conservation (ATBC 2014)

Planning for the 51st Annual Meeting of the Association for Tropical Biology and Conservation (ATBC 2014) is moving into the advanced stages as the dates for the meeting in Cairns, Australia (20–24 July 2014) rapidly approach.

Given that ATBC celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2013 with an outstanding meeting in Costa Rica, the conference theme for next year, entitled *The Future of Tropical Biology and Conservation*, will provide an exciting forum to look ahead at the big challenges to be faced over the next 50 years. Conference Organising Committee Chair, Dr Steve Turton of James Cook University, has been very pleased with the high level of interest shown in the conference, as evidenced by a substantial number of hits on the conference website and strong registrations of interest from ATBC members and non-members alike.

James Cook University has signed up as the Conference Partner and 10 organisations have joined the growing list of sponsors. The conference organisers will continue to seek further sponsorship to ensure conference registration fees are kept in line with those at recent ATBC meetings in developing countries.

Calls for symposia closed recently, with 34 proposals submitted to the Science Committee, ably chaired by Dr William Laurance of James Cook University. The final list of symposia for the conference is being considered by the committee and will be announced soon. In addition to symposia there will be opportunities for delegates to present papers in open sessions that will be scheduled across the four days. An outstanding line-up of keynote speakers has been put together for the conference, including Senator Christine Milne, Leader of the Australian Greens Party. We will update details of speakers on the web site as arrangements are finalised.

As with previous ATBC meetings, there will be pre- and post-conference workshops, satellite meetings and scientific field excursions to the Wet Tropics of Queensland and Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Areas.

For more details, the conference website is at www.atbc2014.org

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Development of a standardised national methodology for coral reef surveys

The sustainable use of fisheries resources is a primary concern of the Fisheries Administration (FiA), and it is their aim to determine the current health status of coral reef ecosystems around the Cambodian coast. Monitoring the state of Cambodian coral reefs is important for tracking progress towards national and international targets for marine protection and to inform reef protection measures, such as the establishment of Cambodia's first Marine Fisheries Management Area (MFMA), which is currently under development in the Koh Rong Archipelago. In order to determine the success of such conservation initiatives, continual monitoring of constituting reefs is paramount.

Throughout the Cambodian coastline there are numerous non-governmental organisations and private sector companies undertaking research to assess the health of coral reef communities. Each of these organisations is currently using independent monitoring strategies, thus rendering their collected data incomparable from location to location. The FiA therefore requested the development of a standardised national methodology for surveys across Cambodian reefs to facilitate data comparisons.

In November 2013, Coral Cay Conservation, in collaboration with the FiA and Fauna & Flora International (FFI), delivered a workshop involving key organisations that are currently collecting, or planning to collect, coral reef data (Frontier, Shallow Waters, Song Saa Foundation, and Save Cambodian Marine Life, amongst others). A unified national survey method was proposed and agreed upon, including the compilation of a target indicator species list. Since

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then, this methodology has been approved by the FiA and is now in operation.

It is hoped that this will be an important first step towards the creation of a national coral reef database. This will help gauge the success of the proposed and future MFMA's, and allow the FiA to make detailed assessments of coral reef health nationwide.

We thank the Blue Moon Fund and Darwin Initiative for funding the workshop.

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