



MEDIA RELEASE

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Undersea treasures discovered off Victoria's Surf Coast

A breathtaking array of marine life on Victoria's seafloor has been discovered off Victoria's Surf Coast by Deakin University scientists.

The discovery includes previously unknown 'gardens' of magnificently coloured sponges, seaweed forests and seagrass meadows, and submerged river systems and lagoons that would have supported Aboriginal communities over 10,000 years ago.

The findings were captivating and would redefine the way the Victorians see their marine environment, according to Dr Daniel Ierodiaconou, Deakin researcher and the principal scientist overseeing the project.

"For the first time we have an accurate and comprehensive picture of life and the diversity of marine habitats along the Surf Coast, including hotspots for marine plants and animal communities," Dr Ierodiaconou said.

"The findings also present a picture of what our region looked like prior to sea-level rise that occurred 10,000 to 12,000 years ago.

"These results will redefine conservation planning, improve fisheries management, and improve infrastructure planning to limit impacts on the environment. More than ever before we will be better informed about ways to conserve these areas and the life they contain for future generations to enjoy."

The research project, which received \$700,000 funding from the Australian Government, mapped seafloor habitats from Anglesea to the 12 Apostles - a massive 600,000 hectares of the State's coastal waters. Research was done by sonar technology, towed video cameras and remotely operated vehicles.

A joint initiative of Deakin University, Fugro Survey P/L, the Australian Maritime College and the Victorian Partnership for Advanced Computing, the work forms part of an ambitious undertaking to eventually map all of Victoria's marine environment.

Victoria's marine environment is home to an estimated 12,000 plants and animals, the vast majority of which are unique to the waters of southern Australia.

"The significance of this work is immense," Dr Ierodiaconou said. "For some areas, this is the first information that has been obtained since Matthews Flinders took depth readings from his boat, the Investigator, in 1803."

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Media contact: Dr Daniel Ierodiaconou, Deakin University, (03) 55633 224, 0409 502 980

Photographs and video footage are available.

Contact Mandi O'Garretty, Deakin Media Unit, (03) 52272776, 0418 361 890

Issued by:

Mandi O'Garretty, Senior Media Officer
Phone 03 5227 2776 Mobile 0418 361 890