



Media Release

Chiefs of Staff, News Directors

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From mapping fish to counting koalas Australians are becoming passionate citizen scientists

“Citizen science brings scientists and the wider community together to work on large-scale scientific projects. It has played an important and celebrated role in the advancement of global knowledge.”

The opening paragraph of an occasional paper to be released by Australia’s Chief Scientist Professor Ian Chubb today (Thursday, July 23) outlines the reason why lead author Associate Professor Gretta Pecl, a researcher at the University of Tasmania’s Institute for Marine & Antarctic Studies (IMAS), is so passionate about involving everyone in science.

Associate Professor Pecl is part of the Hobart-led Redmap (Range Extension Database & Mapping project) team, which invites the Australian community to spot, log and map marine species that are uncommon in Australia.

The 80-strong scientific team verifies each photo submitted and uses the information to work out which Australian marine species may be extending their distribution in response to changes in the marine environment, such as ocean warming.

It’s the perfect example of citizen science in action.

She said she was honoured to be invited by the Office of the Chief Scientist to prepare a paper as part of the Occasional Paper Series which aims to bring to the public’s attention scientific issues of importance to Australian society.

Chris Gillies from The Nature Conservancy, Carla Sbrocchi from the University of Technology Sydney and Philip Roetman from University of South Australia were co-authors of the paper which gives some great examples of the significance of citizen science.

From amateur astronomers tracking the transit of Venus in 1874 to the Audubon Society’s 114-year-old Christmas bird count, to the discovery of the beautiful peacock spider (*Maratus harrisi*) by citizen scientist Stuart Harris, people with a passion for science are working alongside scientists for the benefit of the community.

Today, more than 130,000 Australians are active in more than 90 citizen science projects, predominantly in environmental science fields.

A wide range of organisations are also involved, including universities, all levels of government, schools, industry groups and museums.

Citizen science is capable of:

- Harnessing a large number of contributors to extend the spatial or temporal scale of

data e.g. more than 500 people searched for koalas on one day in South Australia, recording 1500 sightings as part of The Great Koala Count. Researchers developed a model of koala distributions from the spatial data collected.

- Providing new information for government decision-making, creating greater interest in science and better understanding of scientific principles, greater environmental stewardship and more engaging teaching methods for Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects, while helping scientists to understand people's concerns and aspirations.
- Monitoring and notifying relevant authorities on issues such as pest and disease outbreaks, pollution breaches or the discovery of new species.
- Supporting council and regional natural resource management biodiversity strategies, local forest initiatives or assisting in the delivery of wildlife management plans.
- Incorporating local knowledge and historical accounts, and embedding these within larger monitoring and assessment programs.

The paper *Building Australia through Citizen Science* will be officially launched today at the inaugural Australian Citizen Science Conference at The Shine Dome, Canberra, which is being co-convened by the author-team of the Occasional Paper together with Libby Hepburn (Atlas of Life on the Coastal Wilderness) and Dr John La Salle (Director of Atlas of Living Australia).

More than 210 scientists, citizen scientists and government representatives from around Australia are attending the conference.

For more information, images or to organise an interview please contact IMAS media officer Lana Best on 0417 978 025

To read the occasional paper go to: www.chiefscientist.gov.au

For more information on the conference go to:

<http://csna.gaiaresources.com.au/wordpress/conference/>

To learn about Redmap go to: <http://www.redmap.org.au>

Associate Professor Gretta Pecl's background: Associate Professor Pecl is a Deputy Associate Dean of Research for IMAS, an ARC Future Fellow and a previous Fulbright Fellow leading several regional, national and international projects within the Fisheries and Aquaculture Centre at IMAS. Contact Gretta.Pecl@utas.edu.au or 0408 626 792.

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