

## CHAPTER 1

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### INTRODUCTION

#### Australia's Oceans Policy

*Australia's Oceans Policy* was launched by the Australian Government in 1998, the International Year of the Ocean. The Policy has a number of aims, including: exercising and protecting Australia's rights over its marine jurisdiction; meeting obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS); understanding and protecting the marine environment; promoting ecologically sustainable economic development; and establishing integrated planning and management.

#### Regional Marine Planning

At the core of *Australia's Oceans Policy* is regional marine planning, which aims to put in place a management regime at the large marine ecosystem scale. Regional Marine Plans will integrate economic, environmental, social and cultural objectives. The Plans will provide a focus for coordination between existing and developing ocean uses and the range of sectoral and administrative agencies with responsibility for marine systems. The first regional marine plan was released in May 2004 for the South-east Marine Region.

#### The National Oceans Office

The National Oceans Office, which is located within the Australian Government Department of the Environment and Heritage, was formally established on 22 December 1999. The Office, based in Hobart, is responsible for the implementation and further development of *Australia's Oceans Policy*. The Office is responsible for managing the development of regional marine plans around Australia.

The National Oceans Office coordinates a marine science work program to provide scientific information to support implementation of *Australia's Oceans Policy* through Regional Marine Plans. Examples of scientific information collated include bioregionalisation, socio-economic and biophysical datasets.

The focus of the work program is on priority projects that are more efficiently and effectively undertaken on a national scale or are critical for work in priority areas for regional marine planning. This national approach provides considerable efficiency gains over a "region by region" approach. It also ensures a level of consistency between regions and opportunities to link with, and add value to, existing or planned activities of science agencies, including international collaboration.

One major focus for the Program is a National Marine Atlas Project.

