

INTERNATIONAL PACIFIC MARINE EDUCATORS CONFERENCE

BY SYLVIA SPALDING

PRESSURES FROM A RAPIDLY GROWING WORLD POPULATION are changing oceans at an unprecedented rate. From CO₂ concentrations that accelerate global climate change to depletion of fishery stocks, the problems are unprecedented and will require innovative solutions. A worldwide network of educators to focus on these efforts is essential. The International Pacific Marine Educators Conference (IPMEC) was a landmark meeting that culminated in the emergence of such a network of marine educators focused on the Pacific Ocean and the communities who depend on it.



Approximately 100 participants from 18 countries and territories participated in the International Pacific Marine Educators Conference in person or by web conference.

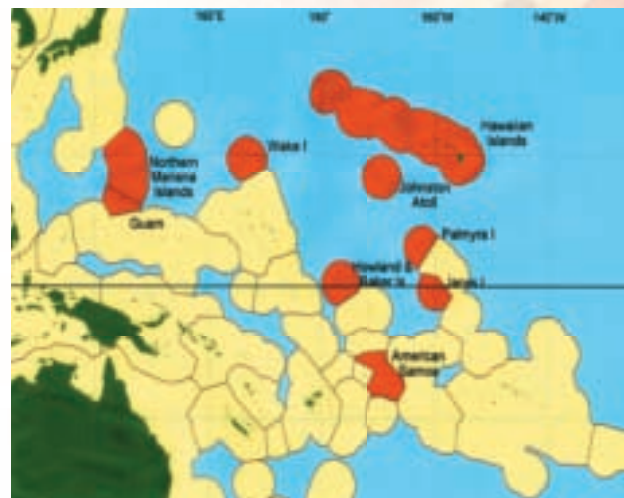
From an historical perspective, one could trace the beginnings of IPMEC to 1990 when John Tomkin, president of the Marine Education Society of Australasia (MESA), led a group of 23 Australian marine educators on a four-week tour of marine education facilities on the West Coast of the United States. The tour resulted in a number of long-time associations between members of MESA and the National Marine Educators Association (NMEA) in North America. Many subsequent cross-cultural visits exposed the challenges in both knowledge and resource sharing on the international scene.

During one such visit, a small group of MESA and NMEA members meeting at the NMEA 2000 conference in Long Beach, California, formed a plan to hold an international meeting of marine educators in conjunction with the scheduled NMEA 2005 conference in Hawaii. Thanks to the contributions of Mike Spranger, Vicki Osis, and Frannie Coopersmith in the USA and Jody Plecas, Mark Rodrigue, and Harry Breidahl in Australia, this first international meeting, the One Ocean Marine Forum (OOMF), brought together 27 marine educators from seven

nations (USA, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Canada, England, and South Africa) for two days at the Maui Community College in July 2005.

With Lisa Heft as facilitator, OOMF formed six action groups. One of these groups, proposed by Kitty Simonds and chaired by Sylvia Spalding of the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council, was dedicated to planning and facilitating an international meeting of marine educators focused on the Pacific Ocean and the communities who depend on it. IPMEC, as it came to be known, was seen as a logical step in the process of uniting marine educators globally. It was envisioned that the conference would result in the creation of a Pacific network of marine educators that could serve as a model for the creation of other regional networks of marine educators and that eventually these various networks might link together to form a global network.

Joining Kitty and Sylvia on the IPMEC organizing committee were Harry and Jody in Australia; Vicki Osis, Mellie Lewis, Richard Murphy, Sarah Schoedinger, and Peter Tuddenham in



The U.S. exclusive economic zone (EEZ) in the Pacific islands (in red) comprises about one-half of the U.S. EEZ.

the continental USA; Barb Klemm, Mellie Lewis, Barbara Mayer, and Sherwood Maynard in Hawaii; and Hugh Govan and Joeli Veitayaki in Fiji. Sponsorship was provided by the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council (platinum), the NOAA Office of Ocean Exploration and National Marine Sanctuary Foundation (gold), and The Ocean Foundation and the National Marine Educators Association (silver).

The conference was initially scheduled to be co-hosted by the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council and the University of the South Pacific and to be held January 15-19, 2007, in Fiji. More than 100 participants from 20 countries submitted abstracts and registrations for the conference. Then in 2006, political unrest in Fiji began to mount. The organizing committee remained hopeful that the political situation would settle, but on December 4, 2006, it agreed that the conference should be relocated. The next day, a political coup in Fiji confirmed that the committee had made the right decision.

Thanks to the hard work and dedication of the staff of the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council, the conference venue, hotel, and field trips were shifted to Honolulu in record time. The conference start date remained January 15, 2007, but logistics required that the conference end a day early, on January 18th. Therefore, anticipated activities to involve communities and sharing resources with them were canceled. The U.S. Department of State helped to expedite visas for foreign travelers. While some participants had to drop out due to the change in venue, other participants joined in. The conference size remained stable at approximately 100 individuals participating in person and by web-conference, but the representation of countries and territories dropped slightly to 18.

Through the technical expertise of the College of Exploration, six of the conference's 70 oral presentations were delivered in real-time via the web from areas spanning the East Coast of the United States to Papua New Guinea, including the U.S. Midwest,



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Mexico, the island of Kauai, and Australia. Moreover, groups from Australia, Hawaii, Mexico, New Caledonia, Papua New Guinea, and the continental United States were able to participate in the conference via the web. They had the option of viewing presentations and engaging in the question-and-answer periods real-time or at their leisure. After the close of IPMEC, the College of Exploration generously made the entire conference available online to anyone at www.coexploration.org/ipmec.

The goals of IPMEC built upon the aims of OOMF as follows:

- Through education, to contribute to a cultural shift towards sustainable use of ocean resources across the Pacific Basin.
- To change our behaviors as educators so we can share our resources and build up the capacity of those educators who don't have those resources both within our own countries and within those countries that lack resources.
- To facilitate the development of Pacific Basin regional marine education leadership networks that will share information, ideas and resources, and reduce duplication.
- To initiate the development of a Pacific Basin marine education networking strategy.
- Focus geographically on the Pacific as a model for other regions to follow and eventually to link up globally.



Breakout sessions featured K-12 initiatives, higher education initiatives, community programs, traditional knowledge, sea turtles, tourism, and web conferencing.



Facilitated workshops led to the establishment of the International Pacific Marine Educators Network (IPMEN).

By all accounts, the conference was a success. A committee was formed to establish the International Pacific Marine Educators Network (IPMEN) with Ben Mikaere Namakin (Federated States of Micronesia) as chair. Other members include Leimana DaMate, Jarad Makaiau, and Jennifer Metz (Hawaii); Jasmine Mason (Canada); Luis Pinto (Chile); Craig Strang and Peter Tuddenham (continental USA); Teny Topalian (Northern Mariana Islands); Nacaniele "Nat" Tuivavalaqi (Marshall Islands); Andrew Vance (Australia); and Ron Vave and Semisi Meo (Fiji). Sylvia Spalding and Harry Bredahl serve as ex officio members.

The IPMEC participants agreed to hold biannual conferences. The 2008 conference is scheduled to be held in Townsville, Australia, October 16-21, in conjunction with the second International Youth Coastal Conference (IYCC). The development of the first IYCC in Queenscliff, Australia, in 2006, was the focus of another OOMF action group, which was led by Andrew Vance who chairs the IPMEN 2008 conference. The 2010 IPMEN conference is scheduled to be hosted by the University of the South Pacific in Fiji, while Chile is looking to host the 2012 conference on Easter Island.

At the 2008 IPMEN conference, the network envisions furthering other goals identified at IPMEC:

- Create a website to include a database inventory of resources, events calendar, etc.
- Develop points of contact for each country and territory in the Pacific.
- Create a list serve of marine educators in the Pacific.
- Train tour operators in the Pacific.
- Develop ocean literacy "principles" for the Pacific.
- Connect IPMEN to other existing networks in the Pacific.
- Build capacity and infrastructure of marine educators in the Pacific.



During the 2006 National Marine Educators Association annual conference, next steps to advance IPMEN were discussed.

To learn about IPMEN and to join this network of educators with a passion for the Pacific Ocean and the communities who depend upon it, please visit www.ipmen.net.

MORE RESOURCES:

College of Exploration:

<http://www.coexploration.org/ipmec>

International Pacific Marine Educators Network:

<http://www.ipmen.net>

One Ocean Marine Forum:

<http://www.mesa.edu.au/inter/oomf01.asp>

SYLVIA SPALDING is the communications officer for the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Council and was the chair of the International Pacific Marine Educators Conference.

PHOTO CREDITS

Page 25 (right): Courtesy of Harry Bredahl

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