



IPMEN'08

Sustaining the Pacific: Learning from Elders, Listening to Youth

October 16th – 19th 2008. Townsville Australia

The International Pacific Marine Educators Network Conference 2008 (IPMEN '08) was an inspiring event held on the edge of The Great Barrier Reef in Townsville, Australia. This conference brought together over 90 people committed to marine education from more than 15 countries across the Pacific Basin, from Japan to Chile, and from Australia to North America. The group comprised educators, scientists, agency representatives, Non-Government Organisations, and philanthropic groups, who have taken an unprecedented step to build partnerships across the region. The object of the conference, the second for the organization, has been to build a knowledge sharing network and the blending of traditional and western knowledge for sustainable ocean management.

The Pacific Ocean contains the largest and most diverse coral reef ecosystems, supports rich temperate zones in its cooler waters, is a major source of food for the world, and extends for over half of the surface of planet earth. It supports ocean based economies and is the engine-room of the earth's climate. The Pacific also supports the most diverse range of cultures in the world from Australasia and East Asia, through the many island countries of Micronesia, Melanesia and Polynesia, through to the Americas. The lives of these people are dependent on the integrity of the Pacific Ocean system.

In the face of vast shared threats such as climate change, marine pollution, over-exploitation of resources, and the challenge of growing populations, it is critical that nations work together to develop solutions to keep the Pacific Ocean healthy, a task that requires immediate attention. The health of the Pacific Ocean is under threat and all Pacific countries must join forces to collaborate in the protection of this unique system.

The conference theme, “Sustaining the Pacific: Learning from elders, listening to youth” drew passionate people from a wide range of marine backgrounds: World recognized specialists such as coral expert Dr Charlie Veron and Dr Stephen Hammond, director of NOAA’s Pacific Marine Environmental Laboratory both delivered engaging presentations on Ocean health, putting human induced climate change into alarming perspective, while passionate educators such as Natalie Davey from Pelican Expeditions and Dr Cathy Oke from Firestarter Communications presented uplifting stories of inspired youth programs making a difference across the Pacific.

IPMEN’08 was organized in parallel with the second International Youth Coastal Conference, which ensured that youth voices were well represented. The concept of running the two conferences together supported the aims of the network and helped to reduce the environmental impact of hosting separate international conferences. Both events respectfully acknowledged the traditional custodians of the land, and promoted the need to recognize traditional knowledge and values in educating for a sustainable ocean.

Due to the technical expertise of the College of Exploration, Delegates who could not attend the conference in person were able to view presentations in real time via the College’s website, <http://www.coexploration.org/ipmen/> and ask questions of the presenters during question time, or review the presentation slides after the conference at their leisure. This technology also enabled the conference organizers to reduce the carbon footprint of the event as two keynote addresses were able to be delivered via the web! The network could not function without the generous support of the College who archive conference proceedings and provide a platform for subgroups to maintain contact and plan for future events. The network also communicates through traditional means where the web is not as accessible, providing funding for students and members in developing nations to attend meetings and upgrade their technology and also utilizes networking technology such as Facebook and Yahoo groups to maintain communication channels.

By supporting a cooperative network of Pacific marine educators, IPMEN is seen as a first step towards the goal of establishing a worldwide marine educators network. The creation of this group began with a two day meeting on the Hawaiian island of Maui in July 2005 and gained considerable momentum at a second international meeting, also in Hawaii, in January 2007. This second meeting, called IPMEC, brought together 100 educators from 18 Pacific nations and territories. IPMEN members have committed to host biannual conferences, with the next scheduled conference scheduled for 2010 in Fiji, hosted by the University of the South Pacific and the following in 2012 in Chile.

IPMEN’08 could not have been possible without the generous and ongoing support of our sponsors, most significantly the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, who continue to foster marine stewardship across the Pacific through their philanthropic projects throughout the region, We also acknowledge the ongoing support of our other sponsors, The Western Pacific Fishery Management Council, the national Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Ocean Exploration Program, The College of Exploration, The University of the South Pacific, Nautilus Educational, The National Marine Educators Association, the Marine Educators Society of Australasia and Telstra.

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.