

MEDIA RELEASE

Thursday 28 August 2014



The most comprehensive report on Sydney Harbour research

The most comprehensive report on the health, habitat and biodiversity of Sydney Harbour was released today by the NSW Minister for the Environment, The Hon Rob Stokes MP and the Sydney Institute of Marine Science (SIMS).

Professor Emma Johnston, Director of the Sydney Harbour Research Program said today that this is the first technical report from the Sydney Harbour Research Program, a flagship project of the SIMS.

“Sydney Harbour is valued for both its beauty and its biological diversity. We have worked for two years to create the most comprehensive report on the health, habitats and biodiversity of the Harbour,” Professor Johnston said.

Written by a team of 15 authors from SIMS, state government agencies and the Australian Museum, this report collates information within the world’s peer-reviewed, scientific literature. It systematically examines scientific databases and canvasses local, national and international scholars.

Johnston, a Professor of marine ecology and ecotoxicology at UNSW said, “Sydney Harbour is a paradox; stunningly beautiful, astonishingly diverse but subject to serious threats. Sydney Harbour hosts a wide variety of habitats which in turn support a great diversity of organisms; a diversity rarely matched in other estuaries or coastal systems globally.”

Dr Luke Hedge, a co-author of the study said, “We were surprised that some habitats and threats were well understood, while other important components of the Harbour were almost unstudied. For example, the Harbour has 42 beaches, but we found almost no studies of the biodiversity of these beaches.”

Some of the other key findings of the report include:

- More than 310 peer-reviewed scientific studies have been published on the Harbour
- There have been very few studies of the Harbour’s ecosystem function upon which ecosystem services rely
- We do not know where emerging contaminants of concern are distributed (e.g. microplastics)
- We lack information on the harbour’s pelagic fish and plankton communities
- There are very few long-term monitoring studies that might allow us to predict future changes

Director of SIMS, Professor Peter Steinberg said that this report provides incredible understanding of Sydney Harbour, but more work needs to be done.

“This is the first Technical Report of the Sydney Institute of Marine Science and it is an exemplar of what can be achieved when scientists from a range of disciplines work together.

“This is produced as a guide to the current state of knowledge of the Harbour. We encourage the further development of our understanding of this system through strategic and integrated research programs,” Professor Steinberg said.

The Sydney Harbour Research Program has more than 35 scientists now contributing time to a strategic research program that addresses knowledge gaps including stormwater and green engineering projects. In the future we hope to develop fine scale habitat maps that incorporate an assessment of habitat quality and conduct the first comprehensive ecological risk assessment for the Harbour.

SIMS is a not for profit marine science facility working to protect and preserve Sydney Harbour for future generations. Fantasea Harbour Hike is the major fundraising activity for SIMS ensuring that this vital work continues.

To be held on Father’s Day Sunday 7 September, it is a 12km walk which starts at Kirribilli, then winds its way around the bays through the Sydney Harbour National Park, meeting SIMS scientists and learning more about their research along the way, and culminates with a marine-themed festival at the Chowder Bay finish line, home of SIMS’ research centre.

Register now at www.harbourhike.com

The Report can be found at www.sims.org.au

For more information, please contact:

SIMS Report – Professor Emma Johnston 0423 236 411
SIMS Media Contact –Scott Crebbin 0419 751 805
Minister’s Media Contact – Andrew Priestley 0417 551 706

