

SDFSA Newsletter – December 2023

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SCUBA DIVERS FEDERATION OF SA, Inc.

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SDFSA Patron:
Dr. Richard Harris



The Deterioration of Piccaninnie Ponds. Photo credit: Lauren Cameo

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REPORT ON PICCANINNIE PONDS

By Lauren Cameo

Back in February 2023 Piccaninnie Ponds was closed to all snorkelling and diving visitors due to a bloom of filamentous algae, which was reducing visibility and impacting on the vegetation, primarily by blocking light to the plants below. I had the opportunity to visit the ponds a little while ago, providing in-water safety support to approved algae-collection activities in the Ponds.

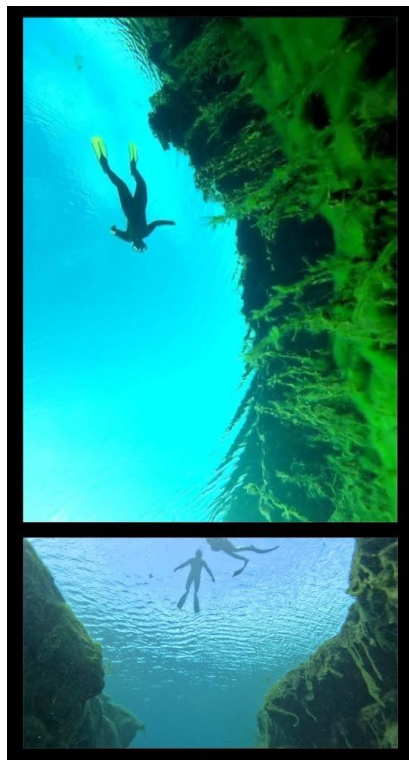
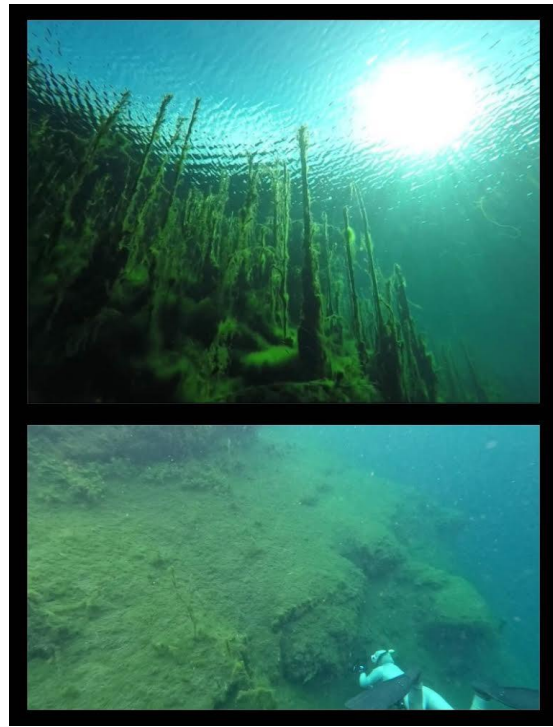
Having seen the ponds just days before the closure, I was able to observe the significant decline in the aquatic vegetation over the course of the year. Unfortunately the vast majority of the aquatic plants that clung to the edges of the first pond and chasm were gone. The few plants that remain were covered in dark algae, which appeared to be smothering them. New growth was visible underneath this however, showing that the few plants that remain are still at least trying to grow, despite the dramatic changes to the ecosystem.

The decline in aquatic vegetation so far hasn't visibly impacted the marine animals commonly observed by visitors (my opinion as a frequent visitor to the site). The schools of fish have tended to move a bit deeper into darker areas, given that the shallows no longer provide shelter. Eels were visible in the usual areas where I'd find them previously, however more easy to find now that they too have almost no vegetation to use for shelter.

At the time of publishing, the ponds remain closed to the public.

The before (top images) and after (bottom images) photos taken by Lauren Cameo tell the story.





All photos credited to Lauren Cameo.

IMPORTANT NOTICES

LEAFY SEADRAGON POACHING: We've had word from the Port Lincoln dive shop that SA Fisheries has caught people poaching Leafy sea dragons, presumably for the aquarium trade. Please keep an eye out for possible poachers, take down number plates and submit your report of suspicious behaviour to FishWatch, 1800 065 522. For more information about FishWatch, go to https://pir.sa.gov.au/recreational_fishing/reporting.

MAJOR UPGRADES TO THE O'SULLIVAN BEACH BOAT RAMP NOW COMPLETED

The O'Sullivan Beach boat ramp has now re-opened after major upgrades which include a new L-shaped pontoon, an extra lane and improvements to the concrete ramps leading down to the water. Visit <https://dit.sa.gov.au/r/obbr> for more details.

REOPENING OF EWENS PONDS

Ewens Ponds, which had been closed to all water activities during spring for their annual rejuvenation, was due to re-open on 1st December. See <https://www.parks.sa.gov.au/parks/ewens-ponds-conservation-park> for further details.

PICCANINNIE PONDS STILL CLOSED UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE

According to <https://www.parks.sa.gov.au/parks/piccaninnie-ponds-conservation-park>, Piccaninnie Ponds is/are closed to the public for water-based activities until further notice. It is best that you check the current situation before making any plans to visit the ponds.

SDFSA COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Our next meeting is Wednesday 24 January 2024 at the Arab Steed Hotel, 7pm in the upstairs meeting room.

INTRODUCING Your SDFSA COMMITTEE MEMBER

Peter Corrigan joined the SDFSA Committee this year. He writes the following:

I have been enchanted by the underwater world ever since my brother got a viewfinder for Christmas in 1974 with a reel of underwater pics, My experiences with Scuba Diving started at the Adelaide Skin Diving Centre in 1985 and progressed to Glenelg Scuba, where I surprised myself by achieving a Dive Master certification.

Now my wife Ilona and I live in Second Valley on the beautiful Fleurieu peninsula taking people on Leafy Sea Dragon tours and running a Dive business. Our motto is, here to serve not to plunder. This comes from a strong belief in putting the environment and people's needs first before the love of money. I became an SDFSA committee member to help out as much as I can, especially on the Fleurieu peninsula.



NEWS FROM SHOPS AND CLUBS

The Cave Divers Association of Australia (CDAA) held their 50th Anniversary celebration and Symposium on the 4-5 November. More than 120 members and guests attended, including CDAA member #1 David Warnes. Patrick Widmann (co-owner of XDeep, KISS rebreathers and Protec Dive centers Mexico) gave two fantastic presentations about his cave explorations in Madagascar and Brazil. Dr Richard Harris (SDFSA Patron) and John Dalla-Zuanna on behalf of the Wet Mules talked about their innovative use of Hydrogen as part of their breathing gas mix during a 230m dive in the Pearse resurgence in NZ. A panel discussion with Andrea Russo, Liz Buttler, Aimee McCran and Tamara May contributed important insights and perspectives on women in cave and technical diving. The 2 day event included a banquet with the theme "A Touch of Gold" - for some it went on into the early hours of Sunday morning.

The CDAA is grateful for the many give aways and door prizes large and small provided by a variety of vendors and dive shops including Diving Adelaide, Adelaide Scuba and Dive Experience. [Thanks to Farzad Atefi for this report!]

The 9th **Neville Coleman Memorial Nudibranch Event** presentation was held recently at the Rodney Fox Museum with special guests An Ng from Semporna Macro Critters Dive Centre in Malaysia, Mark Tozer, museum curator, and Janine Baker. Late December 2023 will be the 10th and final Neville Coleman Memorial Nudibranch Event. It will be the last opportunity for divers, snorkellers and rock poolers to create images for inclusion in the forthcoming Sea Slugs of South Australia guidebook. Please contact Janine Baker for more information. [Information provided from Facebook].

JP Hiraeth, **Diving Veterans and First Responders Program**, reports that there will be a course run in early 2024 on Human Factors in Diving. Message or call JP if you would like further information. Please get in touch via Facebook, mobile 0414530545 or email jp@dvfrp.com.au.

CONGRATULATIONS TO...

- Kangaroo Island/Victor Harbor Dolphin Watch on winning the Ryde International Connecting Communities Award in the 2023 South Australian Community Achievement Awards.
- Peter Stace and Ian Lewis on the recent release of a special edition of "Cave Diving In Australia" to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Cave Divers Association of Australia.
- Those Flinders University Archaeology staff, students and alumni who went to South Korea for APCONF2023, the Asia Pacific conference on underwater cultural heritage. Over 20 delegates from Flinders' maritime archaeology program community delivered many wonderful papers at the conference.
- Those partners that were awarded the SA Science Award for Science and Industry Collaboration - Science to Revive Lost Oyster Reefs in the SA Science Awards 2023 (see further below).
- Andrew Viduka on the publication of [Non-Intrusive Conservation Focussed Monitoring Of Underwater Cultural Heritage By The Public -Gathering Information Via Recreational And Technical \(Girt\) Scientific Divers](#), a new online paper discussing "challenges and learning outcomes from 5½ years of teaching GIRT Scientific Divers, and recent changes to the training programme to scaffold learning, promote collaboration as a team, include a diving buddy keen on natural heritage, and to better manage time during a diving day to leave space to save and label data amongst other things".

- Dr Zoe Doubleday on being appointed a Patron of the Marine Discovery Centre, joining Chris Daniels and Karl Telfer as Patrons of the Centre.
- Adelaide Scuba who recently re-opened at Glenelg North.
- Edithburgh Motors who have done extensive refurbishment to their air fill equipment.
- Rodney Fox who recently celebrated his 83rd birthday.
- Jessica Benthuyesen on being featured as a leader in oceanography in The Australian's 2024 Research Report.
- Scubapro which celebrated its 60th anniversary at this year's DEMA Show.
- Richard Nicholls, owner of Dive Centre Manly, on being awarded a PADI Lifetime Achievement Award at DEMA for 35 years of Diving leadership, dive training and retailing excellence, a passion for aquatic exploration and lifelong dedication to diver education by Drew Richardson the President and CEO of PADI Worldwide. Richard is one of only eight people worldwide to have ever been awarded this honour.

DIVING EXPERIENCES: A Near Miss

By Alex Suslin

Dawn, 21 March 2001. An educational dive trip in the Solomon Islands being run by Allways Dive's Director & spearfishing champion, Geoff Skinner. The diving had been sensational but this had been the night from hell. The mossies just laughed at the "tropical strength" repellent & while the uncomfortable, narrow single bed was covered by a net, any part of one's body in contact with the latter, was fair game for these winged vampires. What was worse – I'd woken to a numb arm & tingling fingers, which, as we know, are the classic symptoms of Decompression Illness.

The sooner one can get treatment, the better but even so, I found myself in denial & had to take some moments to mentally go through yesterday's dive profile. Dive 1, the WWII minesweeper Aaron Ward. I'd sat on the sand under the knife-edge bow & Geoff had video-ed me pointing to the Aladin dive computer reading 66.6 meters. A 47 minute dive, with a big chunk of that breathing off the deco bottle. No computer violations or warnings. Dive 2 was on a WWII Kawamishi float plane in 30 meters - kept to a mere 13 minutes, to maximize bottom time on the next dive, which was a vertical descent into the Twin Towers lava tubes, bottoming out at 44 meters & exiting through a large swim-through onto a wall face, to be buzzed by some disconcertingly big Bronze whalers. 40 minutes, including deco well in excess of computer requirements & again, no violations or warnings.

Yes, a couple of cleansing ales at the end of the day but plenty of water, both between & after dives. As a former long-distance runner, I'd used urine colour as a hydration indicator. A pale straw hue the night before was proof all was well. Despite all that, I'd somehow taken a "hit".

I rolled over on my back – the mosquitos were taking a break. Couple of deep breaths, then dress & go & break the bad news to Geoff. At least, the DAN dive insurance would cover hyperbaric treatment & other medical costs. Then, slowly, the numbness & tingling drained away & the light-bulb went on. In an effort to avoid contacting the net, I'd lain on one side & on the affected arm.

Telling the story over breakfast raised a few chuckles but it was gratifying to be asked by several of the team during the day, "are you ok?"

STEVE'S SCIENCE STORIES for the month

By Steve Reynolds

OYSTER REEF RESTORATION

Federal Labor Member for Hindmarsh, Hindmarsh MP and Federal Minister for Health and Aged Care, Mark Butler, recently announced Government plans to help to restore 5000 square metres of native flat oyster, *Ostrea angasi*, shellfish reefs in the Port River estuary. He said that the Government will invest \$181,500 to restore long-lost native oyster reefs, and mangrove forests, in the river. The project will be delivered by Ozfish. The restoration of the oyster reefs and mangrove habitat will improve water quality and provide habitat for fish and other native species. The project can be found at [Shellfish Restoration – Estuary Care Foundation SA](#)

Meanwhile, a collaboration between the University of Adelaide, Nature Conservancy, AusOcean and the government was awarded the SA Science Award for Science and Industry Collaboration - Science to Restore Lost Oyster Reefs at the SA Science Awards 2023. According to the web page found at <https://mailchi.mp/858b3f268e98/ausocean-wins-at-the-sa-science-and-innovation-awards?e=6f399c73d4>, this collaboration “has revived an extinct ecosystem to restore fish production and water quality for the enjoyment of people, and to provide economic opportunities.”

“Oyster reefs once carpeted our gulfs to provide food and shelter for fish and clean the coastal waters with their filter feeding but had been dredged to extinction. Drawing on knowledge from marine biologists and marine engineers that baby oysters can hear underwater sounds and use them to navigate, the team played underwater music that is attractive to baby oysters and provided them with highways of sound to navigate to reefs being built for them.

“Part of this work involved building low-cost speakers to play the most attractive sounds for oysters, so that the oysters can rebuild their reefs far quicker than nature would normally allow. This journey created a eureka moment in science with the discovery that marine life can be so fundamentally influenced by sound that their entire life cycles can depend on the natural production of healthy soundscapes.”

PAPER ON THE DIVERSITY & DISTRIBUTION OF SPONGE COMMUNITIES IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN SEA

Vasilis Gerovasileiou*, Caterina Stamouli and Eleni Voultsiadou have published a paper titled [Sponge Community Patterns in Mesophotic and Deep-Sea Habitats in the Aegean and Ionian Seas](#) in the Journal of Marine Science and Engineering as part of the Special Issue “5th International Workshop on Taxonomy of Atlanto-Mediterranean Deep-Sea & Cave Sponges”.

* (I try to follow Vasilis' activities since I hosted him when he visited Adelaide during his visit to Australia 10 years ago in 2013.)

Their study “sheds light on the diversity and distribution of sponge communities in mesophotic and deep-sea soft substrates of the eastern Mediterranean Sea, utilizing sampling material from fish stock monitoring programs and indicating the potential for new discoveries in the area.”

According to the paper's Abstract, “Sponge assemblages play a significant role in the functioning of the Mediterranean benthic ecosystem. The main goal of this study was to investigate the diversity

and distribution of poorly known sponge communities in the mesophotic and deep-sea substrates of the eastern Mediterranean Sea.

“More than 1500 sponge specimens belonging to 87 taxa were collected from 156 stations during experimental and commercial bottom trawling in the Aegean Sea and the eastern part of the Ionian ecoregion, at depths of between 10 and 800 m. A total of 79 sponge species were found in the Aegean and 40 species in the Ionian Sea.

“Eight of these species are included in lists of endangered and threatened species, two were newly recorded in the Aegean and six were first recorded in the east Ionian Sea. Both community structure and diversity differed between the two ecoregions.

“Species richness, biomass, abundance and diversity decreased with increasing depth, while different species dominated, in terms of biomass, abundance and frequency of appearance, in the two ecoregions and the separate depth zones.

“In contrast with previous investigations, which mostly examined shallow-water sponges, no clear resemblance patterns were observed among the north and south Aegean subareas, probably due to the homogeneity of the deep-sea habitats under investigation. This study, using sampling material from fish stock monitoring programs for the first time, contributed to our knowledge of the largely unknown eastern Mediterranean mesophotic and deep-sea sponge populations, which are subjected to intensive trawling activities.”

According to the Conclusions, “Typically, the aim of scientific bottom trawl surveys is to gather information on the distribution of a variety of fish species, as well as to estimate their relative abundance and other biological characteristics. However, for several species (mainly non-commercial invertebrates or bycatch species) for which information is scarce, trawl surveys (such as the MEDITS trawl survey) can be used as a primary tool for providing useful information on structural and biological parameters.

“The present study is an example of the comprehensive use of such research resources and effort. Herein, we managed to make the most out of research cruises that were intended to study mainly fish stocks and we gained information about a poorly known part of the eastern Mediterranean marine ecosystem.

“Overall, this study sheds light on the seldom investigated sponge communities in the mesophotic and deep-sea grounds of the eastern Mediterranean Sea, indicating the potential for new discoveries in the area.”

FOR YOUR CALENDAR: FORTHCOMING EVENTS

South Australia

Saturday 9 December: The Friends of Gulf St Vincent Annual General Meeting is being held from 9am to 10am at the Marine Discovery Centre, cnr. Seaview Rd & Marlborough St, Henley Beach (Star of the Sea school grounds). Morning tea provided, followed by a tour of the MDC and beach walk with support staff.

25 February 2024: Dive for Cancer

2024: The Underwater Explorers Club of South Australia turns 70 in 2024 and the club is seeking to contact past members to help them to celebrate. If you haven't yet been in contact with the club, contact Sue at Sue_C@iinet.net.au or on 0438 882 509.

Interstate/International

7 - 9 June 2024: The 18th Malaysia International Dive Expo (MIDE) 2024 being held at Level 1, Hall 2, Malaysia International Trade & Exhibition Centre (MITEC) Kuala Lumpur.

10 – 18th August 2024: National Science Week.

15-16th March 2025: ADEX Australia, incorporating OZTek Advanced Diving Conference 2025 is being held at the Sydney International Convention and Exhibition Centre, Darling Harbour Hall 2. OZTek Advanced Diving Conference will be celebrating 25 years, ADEX celebrates 30 years in 2024.

August 7 to 17, 2025: According to https://www.deeperblue.com/2025-world-games-to-include-freediving-as-part-of-its-program/?mc_cid=2a9b8e09dd&mc_eid=d4cc43123c, "The 2025 World Games in Chengdu, China will include dynamic freediving and para-freediving as part of its athletic program, according to the World Underwater Federation (CMAS). The 12th edition of the World Games will take place between August 7 to 17, 2025, and Freediving and Para-Freediving will join Finswimming and 35 other sports."

ABOUT THE SDFSA...

SDFSA is a non-profit, incorporated membership association dedicated to the preservation and enjoyment of our unique underwater world.

JOIN US FOR FREE!

<https://sdfsa.net/membership-categories/>

The more members we have, the stronger our influence. We serve as a peak body representing the interests of South Australian recreational scuba divers and the related sports of freediving and snorkelling, including the provision of information to government and the general public. Together we can have real impact on the issues affecting the South Australian diving community.

If you wish to be added to the mailing list for this Newsletter, join the SDFSA!

You can also read about the Federation's work in monthly issues of DiveLog Australasia, Scubadiver ANZ and on our website at <https://sdfsa.net>. Stay up to date with the latest news through our Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/scubadivesa/>. And follow our FB group, SA Dive Sites Vlz and Conditions for current diving conditions shared by the group members.

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