

5 May 2014

UNDERWATER & AIRBORNE TECHNOLOGY TO HELP MAP GULF SEAGRASS

SA Water will this month begin the testing phase of a research project to develop a more efficient and effective way of mapping seagrass in South Australia's Gulf St Vincent.

The project is a collaboration between the Taiwan-based National Cheng Kung University (NCKU) and Instrument Technology Research Centre (ITRC) and is funded by a \$300,000 international research grant received through the 2012/13 Premier's Research and Industry Fund.

Minister for Science and Information Economy, Gail Gago, says the project continued the Government's strong track record of investing in science, research and innovation.

"Projects like these drive innovation and create new opportunities for our science community to stay at the forefront of new knowledge and techniques that maximise the economic, health and environmental benefits for South Australians," she says.

SA Water and NCKU have previously worked together on several other research ventures and early last year created the Global Water Quality Research Centre in Taiwan, along with the China Steel Corporation.

Scientists and engineers from each organisation have made exchange visits and NCKU has contributed significant labour and provided advanced capability and technology to some SA Water projects.

SA Water's Senior Manager of Research and Innovation, Mike Burch, says the latest joint-project will evaluate advanced technology involving an underwater sensor towed behind a boat that can generate a detailed map of the coastal seabed.

"During field work over the next year, we will also look at collecting data from airborne sensors such as remote-controlled drones and satellites which will help build larger-scale seafloor maps," he says.

"This technology is seen as a significant improvement on the traditional mapping method of aerial photography which can be costly and is unable to collect what is referred to as digital hyper-spectral information which provides more accurate and clearer images.

"The sensors may also ultimately be used to monitor and manage water quality in both the ocean and in reservoirs."

Media Release

Minister for Water, Ian Hunter, says data gathered as part of the mapping will give a clearer picture of the health of the seagrass.

“There’s more than 9,500km² of seagrass along South Australia’s coastline, which provides an essential habitat to a wide range of marine species such as fish, crabs and sea urchins,” he says.

“It also stabilises the seabed to prevent erosion and sand movement.”

Scientists from NCKU and ITRC will be visiting Adelaide from the 5th-9th of May, and will be bringing with them a recently modified sensor and underwater towing platform which will be tested in an area of Gulf St Vincent.

Further field work on the project is scheduled to be undertaken between July and August this year.

Media are invited to attend to attend one of the first stages of testing:

Date – Wednesday 7th May, 2014

Time – 10.30am

Location – O’Sullivan Beach boat ramp, Francis St, O’Sullivan Beach

Dress requirements – Flat, enclosed shoes

SA Water’s Senior Manager of Research and Innovation, Mike Burch will be available for interview on the day.

Please contact the SA Water media team on **(08) 7424 2477** if you wish to attend. Confirmation is needed to finalise numbers.