



## Points of Interest

- *Summer - Autumn Activity Program – enjoy our exciting and interesting activities*
- *Volunteers Wanted!*
- *Dive group news*
- *Shorebird and Grey Nurse Shark update*

## Next Meeting

*Our next meeting will be held on April 3— details on page four*

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## FROM THE SECRETARY.....

Welcome to the new edition of our newsletter. We hope you like the new format. It will come out like this every couple of months or so. In between we will keep people informed as necessary, by email. We are always interested in your views and feedback. If you have anything you would like to say, please contact us (see back page for contact details). If you would like to take part in any of the Coming Activities ( Pages 1-2), please contact us ASAP. Also, thanks to Melanie White for the new-look layout.

*Best Regards, Bill Barker, Secretary*

## SUMMER-AUTUMN ACTIVITY PROGRAM

### Sun 22 Feb - Snorkel, Barlings Beach

Following the success of our last snorkel at Tomakin, we are running another at Barlings Beach. Meet at the beach end of the track on the Guerilla Bay side of the Barlings Beach Caravan Park at 10am. This will be a social/fun outing, but Jenny Edwards will bring the survey

equipment so that anyone interested can learn how we do the snorkel surveys.

We will give you a briefing beforehand on safety issues and what you might expect to see. Bring mask, snorkel, fins and, if you have one, a wet-suit (water temperature is

around 18-19 degrees at the moment).

Please contact Jenny Edwards if you want to come, and give her a phone number for contacting you if the weather or seas are unsuitable. Please RSVP using contact details on back page.

### Sat 28 Mar - Afternoon Rock shelf Walk, Broulee

Meet at Surf Club car park at 3pm - the low tide will be 0.3m at 4.10pm.

Rock shelf rambles are always happy with their visits to the Broulee rock shelf. You will find a wide range of critters,

many of whom you probably didn't know existed. Bring a hat, appropriate footwear, sunscreen, water, field guides, digital cameras, a pole for helping you balance, hand lenses and any other bits and pieces you might want. Re-

member that the rocks can be slippery and uneven and care has to be taken. We will provide a safety briefing prior to the walk. Please RSVP using contact details on back page.

### Dates TBA - Camping, Mystery Bay - register interest!

Mystery Bay has sheltered beaches and is surrounded by forest. Camping gives us a chance to indulge in a variety of activities - diving, snorkelling, swimming, walks - as

well as good company. We usually arrive on Friday afternoon onwards and stay two nights - Friday and Saturday. We have not yet set a date (possibly April or May) but

Please RSVP using contact details on back page.

## SUMMER-AUTUMN ACTIVITY PROGRAM

Sun 29 Mar, Sun Apr 5 - Snorkel with Seals, Montague Island

*“Snorkelling with the seals is amazing and unforgettable.”*

A repeat of our most popular activity. Last time we had over 30 participants. To reduce crowding, we are looking at booking the boat for consecutive weekends this time, with a limit of 20 each day.

Snorkelling with the seals is amazing and unforgettable. You can witness their fun-filled acrobatics at close hand. While they are wild animals and should be treated with respect, the seals are not at all aggressive and seem as keen on having fun as their human visitors.

As usual, we will leave the Narooma Town Wharf at around 9.30 on Sunday 29 March, returning around 1.30 or 2.00. We will go with Narooma Charters, who are experienced at doing this and who have looked after us previously. The cost will be \$77 per person for adults and \$55 per child 15 years and under. Payment is made on boarding and can be made by cash or credit card. This is a discount on their usual price.

It is about a 30 minute trip to the island. We would then get in the water for two or three snorkels, including probably two with the seals, for 45 minutes to 1 hour at a time. People participating should be able to swim and feel generally comfortable in the water. Entry to and exit from the water will be from the boat and people will generally stay close to the boat. People participating will need mask, snorkels, fins and wetsuits (of whatever kind). If people don't have their own they can be hired from the Ocean Hut, Narooma, or In-depth Scuba at Batemans Bay. In addition, Narooma Charters has masks, snorkels and fins on the boat, but anyone planning on this would need to check in advance. People can snorkel without a wetsuit, of course, but they might get cold quickly and the wetsuit provides additional buoyancy as well. The usual hats, sunscreen, water, warm jacket, towel and camera (underwater if possible) should also be brought. The boat operator provides some basic refreshments (tea, coffee etc). I will provide a briefing and snorkelling tips.

If you are interested in this great trip, contact us via details on back page. I need to know numbers early so that I can confirm with Narooma Charters. If there is a lot of interest it will be 'first in, best dressed'.

Any trip like this is weather dependent, of course. The seals are in a generally sheltered location and the island offers several other sites.



### Recent Activities

Our activities this summer have been so popular with members that, if anything, we have had sometimes to struggle to cope with the numbers taking part. But thanks everyone for coming along, having a good time and demonstrating your interest in the marine environment.

The surprise package has been our night snorkels under the Narooma Wharf. We did this on 9 and 23 January, with over 20 people on the first occasion and about 15 on the second.

Everyone taking part loved the wealth of unusual and colourful marine life to be found at night. Divers have taken hundreds of photos, which we hope to be able to make available in some form in the future.

16 participants went along to the Broulee Rock shelf walk on 10 January. The highlight was three octopuses but, as usual at this great site, there were many other critters to be seen.

- As mentioned we had over 30 members on our Montague

Island snorkel with the seals on 18 January. With the 5 that the charter operator had taken on as well, it meant that we were pretty snug on the boat. However, the weather gods smiled on us and everyone had a great time. We had a social snorkel at Tomakin on 14 January. Once again there was a good turn-out. Everyone got wet and had a good time but we have decided that the site has limitations and that we will focus on more interesting sites for future snorkelling outings.



## Schools Program—Volunteers Wanted!

NCMG members will be helping with a morning snorkelling and/or rock shelf program in collaboration with the Batemans Marine Park and the Eurobodalla Council.

These programs are a lot of fun and very satisfying.

We have a range of programs through the year and volunteers are always welcome to help out.

The programs for early 2009 are as follows:

1. The Mar 4-5 program will be held at either Broulee or Moruya Heads (depending on conditions) with children from the Moruya Primary School.

2. The Mar 18-19 Program will be a rock shelf walk at Casey's Beach with children from St Bernards.

3. The April 1 - 2 Program is a rock shelf walk and snorkel at Casey's Beach with children from St Bernards.

All of these excursions fall on Wednesday/Thursday during the day.

If you'd like to help, contact us via details on back page.

## Snorkel Surveys—Volunteers Wanted!

NCMG's snorkel surveys of local marine life is an important contribution to the Batemans Marine Park database of what is in our waters. This program will become more important this year, with the Group having won an \$8000 grant to carry this work forward. Rob Richardson is coordinating this program. NCMG members have been out with Marine Park staff on a couple of occasions over the past month and have done 6 of the 9 sites in the current cycle. We are aiming to survey each of the 9 sites three times a year. The surveys involve doing three transects at each of nine sites both in and outside the Marine Park. Each transect involves the following:

\* laying a 30 metre weighted line and identifying and counting all the fish within 2 1/2 metres of the line while swim along it;

\* identifying and counting mobile invertebrates within 1 metre on one side of the line;

\* identifying the bottom cover under each one metre point along the line.

The work is done in teams, with different snorkelers carrying out separate tasks.

We are looking get more people involved in this program. Because of weather conditions, the surveys are often set up at fairly short notice. If we have a larger pool of snorkelers, it will be easier to ensure that we do not

miss good weather opportunities.

**We will train interested people in the methodology and ID skills** necessary to participate in this program. As part of this, we will do a mock survey when we are having a normal social snorkel, beginning **this Sunday**. This will give potential participants a better idea of what is involved. It is not all that difficult and can help you build up a knowledge of our marine life and marine ecology. It is also fun to visit a wide range of nice places up and down our coast. Interested parties should RSVP using contact details on back page.



## About Snorkeling...

Snorkelling is a fun way to see the fish, marine mammals, larger invertebrates and marine habitats that make our coast such a great part of the world. Snorkelling is pretty easy and is suitable for all ages, men and women, boys and girls. Anyone who is reasonably comfortable in the water can snorkel and the only essential equipment is mask, snorkel and fins. While not absolutely essential, a wetsuit makes things much more comfortable. We are running social snorkels, night snorkels, snorkelling with the seals, snorkel surveys and snorkel training courses. We are looking at running snorkelling clinics for those who may not have done much snorkelling or who feel they could benefit from some supervised in-water practice.

Please RSVP using contact details on back page. Sessions can be run on demand so long as we have two participants.

Contact NCMG about any of these exciting activities:

[info@ncmg.org.au](mailto:info@ncmg.org.au)

[www.ncmg.org.au](http://www.ncmg.org.au)

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## NCMG INVOLVEMENT - FUTURE ENVIRONMENTAL EVENTS

Several events are coming up over the next few months that we are looking to be involved in in some way. They provide opportunities to provide information on the marine environment, to involve children and young people in activities and to build our membership.

Our participation generally involves a stall or display. We need volunteers to help organise, set up and staff the various activities. Coming activities include:

- . Seaweek - This will involve setting up a display at the Moruya library for the first week in March that will publicise marine conservation and the NCMG. We definitely need some assistance with this.
- . Amplify concert Sat 4 April - midday till dusk at Riverside Park Moruya- theme environment and sustainability.
- . World Environment Day at local schools - Friday 5th June - more details to come - theme to tie in with Slow Food / Local produce could be seafood that is caught sustainably, fish size/bag limits, etc.
- . Slow Food Expo 20 and 21 June - theme as above but targeted at adults - more details to come
- Sustainability Expo in Moruya at the time of the Jazz Festival in October.

If you'd like to help, contact us via details on back page.

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## Future Activities - Stay Tuned

- 1. Sunday 5 April - morning ramble and beach walk Meringo forest and beach:** Andrew Green to lead. There will be a low tide of 0.4m at 11.20am. Further details closer to the time.
- 2. Easter- Snorkelling:** Possibly at Broulee on the morning high tide on Sunday 12 April. Further details closer to the time.
- 3. Sunday 26 April - snorkel/dive and picnic at Bawley Point:** This is a popular dive and snorkelling location with a rich marine life. We are looking at making a day of it - once again further details closer to the time.

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## Next Meeting - Strategy Meeting

The Executive committee would like to engage members in a discussion about the Group's future strategy. This will mainly focus on renewal and sustainability. At the moment, we are; running activities such as rock shelf walks, snorkelling and scuba diving; have established and maintain a website; conduct our snorkel research program; have sought and gained financial support; collaborate with the Batemans Marine Park; have general meetings with informative speakers; have workshops on marine life and snorkel training courses; prepare a regular marine life column in the local newspapers; participate in local events and displays; are working with others on a schools program; have guided rock shelf walks for tourists visiting the area; and, we participate in local debates on marine conservation issues.

The Group has grown substantially and now has more than 150 members. To maintain our program into the future we are hoping that more members of the group will become involved more substantially in the group's work. Given the range of things we are doing, there are many opportunities for people to become involved in many ways. Even organising our activities requires person power rather than specialised knowledge. Involvement depends on individual interests and availability of course and we understand that some members may feel they do not know enough about the marine environment to take a more active role. we would like to make an investment in developing people's skills by providing appropriate training so that, for example, more members could lead a rock shelf walk.

We are interested to discuss these issues with the wider membership and propose to have a general meeting on Friday evening 13 April for the purpose. We haven't settled on a venue yet, which will depend on numbers. We would intend it

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also to be a social occasion, for members to meet each other and talk about the marine environment. If anyone is interested in getting more involved please get in touch with us, via contact details on back page.

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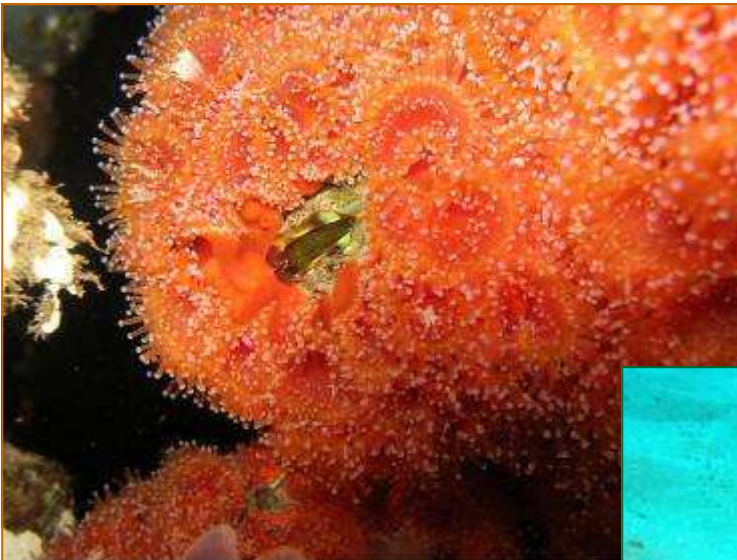
## DIVE GROUP

Dive Group members were keen to lead the way on our Narooma Wharf outings. It was hard to get those with cameras out of the water. Andrew Green again found the rare Black Cod, among many other interesting sightings.

On 14 February 9 NCMG divers took to the waters off Batemans Bay to search for Weedy Seadragons. Jasmin and Christine struck it lucky with sightings of two on our first dive. Tony Brown was close at hand to take photos.

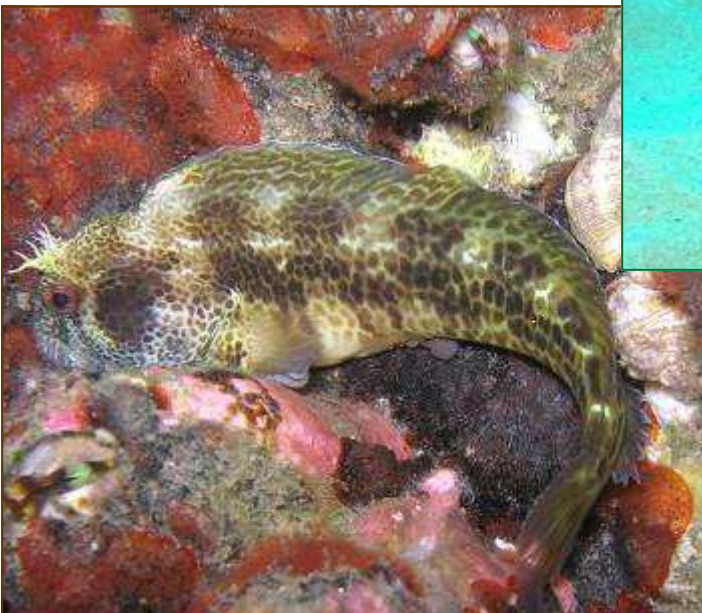
We didn't see any more but we did come across a range of other interesting and unusual creatures including rock flathead and cat sharks. We were well looked after by In-depth Scuba Batemans Bay. We appreciate their support for the NCMG and marine conservation.

Dr Mel is going to prepare a spreadsheet so that our sightings of rare and unusual marine creatures can be recorded in a more systematic way. Hopefully this will build up a picture of where the various fishes and other creatures are to be found and some idea of their numbers.



- *Left: A barnacle feeding on a Narooma Wharf pylon, surrounded by jewel anemones*
- *Centre Right: The colourful Weedy Sea dragon*
- *Bottom Left: A blenny clings to a pylon at the Narooma Wharf*

*Photos by Bill Barker*

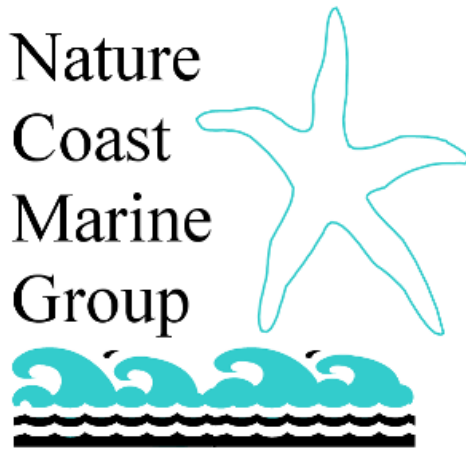


## NATURE COAST MARINE GROUP

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### MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

At its meeting last month, the Executive made several decisions about membership:

\* Even though our membership fee is very low, children under 12 will in future have free membership.

\* Persons taking part in NCMG activities must be members. For people new to the group, membership forms can be completed and submitted on the day of the activity.

\* We encourage members to pay multi-year subscriptions in advance. From now on, instead of accepting donations, we will add any amounts above \$5 to future years' membership, so that the member does not have to pay another subscription the following year. For example, if a member paid \$5 membership fee plus a \$20 donation, that member would now receive a membership for 5 years.

## What's News

### MEDIA

Tune in to Dr Mel Coleman (Marine Park Science Project Officer) who be heard on local ABC Southeast radio every second Tuesday talking about the marine environment. Keep your eyes open for our fortnightly articles on marine life in the local press (Narooma News and the Moruya Examiner/Bay Post). If you've missed them or want to catch up with past articles, check our website [www.ncmg.org.au](http://www.ncmg.org.au). Collectively the articles are a useful resource for anyone wanting to learn about marine life.

### GREY NURSE SHARKS

These sharks are an iconic local species and are classified as threatened. Usually they are to be found from November to April at sites at the Tollgate Islands (Batemans Bay) and Montague Island. Unfortunately, they have been conspicuous by their absence this year, with no sharks at the Tollgates site and only scattered sightings at Montague Island. It is not clear why this should be. There is speculation that the colder water this summer may have kept them away. It is to be hoped this is the reason and not a further decline in their numbers.

### SHOREBIRDS FIGHT BACK!

An item in our last newsletter focused on the endangered little terns that come to the Tuross Estuary to breed. We talked about the vulnerability of their nesting habit and the dedicated volunteers who help protect them. This season started well with many nests established on two sand islands in the Tuross Lake near the sand spit separating it from the sea. However December rains caused the lake level to rise, inundating most of the nests, eggs and chicks, with almost all of the few remaining being predated by gulls. Undeterred, the plucky little terns 'picked themselves up, dusted themselves off and started all over again', by establishing new nests on the spit itself. This raised them above the tide level and kept them out of the way of predators. Soon there were dozens of nests. While there were a few worries about the New Year king tides, the nesting site remained secure. Overall, it was a successful breeding season, with at least 30 chicks having fledged, a great result (last year there were only 9). Volunteers fenced the site off and tourists and locals respected the area, allowing the little terns to go about their breeding undisturbed. Volunteers worked hard on this, guided by National Parks shorebirds co-ordinator Amy Harris (also an NCMG member). While this was a good result, the shorebirds remain under constant threat. And unfortunately, people are not always as supportive as those around Tuross. Some endangered shorebird nests in other areas of the South Coast were lost because of the moronic action of vandals, who destroyed nests, fencing and signs.

Anyone with a particular interest in shore birds might want to attend the pelican rescue workshop in Narooma on 21 March. Contact us via details at the top of this page.

### YOUR EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The six-person Executive Committee has charge of the running of the Group in between Annual General Meetings. President is Andrew Green, Vice-President is Jenny Edwards, Secretary is Bill Barker, Treasurer is Melanie White, Webmaster is Jock Howe.