

## International engagement provides a PD opportunity for regional professionals

Even with the sophisticated communications we now have, isolation is still a constant issue that my colleagues and I must deal with working in small special libraries such as my own at the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA), located in North Queensland. Our regional ALIA group (TropicALIA) works extremely hard to get visiting experts to call, and to arrange local professional development opportunities, but there are still many development opportunities that just don't exist for regional professionals.

Becoming involved with the international Group of Experts on Marine Information Management (GE-MIM) has greatly assisted me with my professional development. The group has continually exposed me to technological innovations long before they have appeared in more general library discussions. The other members of this committee are vastly experienced librarians, and often run large libraries, such as the US NOAA Library Services, University of Southampton Libraries, and Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution. To be working with such knowledgeable professionals who are so willing to share their knowledge and expertise is a rare privilege.

GE-MIM is a technical advisory committee of UNESCO's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC). In 1999, I was invited to be the Australasian representative of this committee which comprises eight librarians with specialist expertise and background in marine and environmental libraries and information management. Our parent is the International Oceanographic Data and Information Exchange (IODE), a major program of the IOC.

The role of this team is to outline, review and prioritize tasks for implementation under IODE activities and work on specific marine science information issues. We are required to:

- identify and highlight technological developments in information management to the IODE
- identify opportunities and assist the IODE with capacity building, resource sharing and networking in marine information centres in a world regional context
- identify and build strong working relations with other relevant organizations, such as the World Meteorological Organization, and the International Association of Aquatic and Marine Science Libraries and Information Centers (IAMSLIC), with a view to developing joint projects and sharing expertise

Since its establishment in 1984, GE-MIM has supported and initiated many projects to improve capability of IOC member states to benefit from and participate in marine information networks and services. Examples of recent projects are:

- development of OceanTeacher, a web-based educational tool for marine information professionals
- OceanDocs, an internationally regarded e-repository of marine digital publications
- OceanExpert, a directory of marine and aquatic experts
- development and support of regional Oceanographic Data and Information Networks (ODINs) to improve access to ocean data and information, develop technical skills, and develop infrastructure for archiving and dissemination of information; to date, networks have been developed in Africa (ODINAFRICA), Latin America (ODINCARSA), and Eastern Europe (ODINECET)

Our most recent successes have been in the Pacific, with a regional network (ODINPIMRIS) of marine and environmental libraries being established in 2008. Since then the network has launched its own website, a Pacific Islands Marine Portal, and a PIMRIS Regional Repository. We have also undertaken a number of capacity building exercises in the region, which

continue to go from strength to strength.

Many hundreds of library professionals from developing countries have benefitted greatly from their involvement with, and support of, GE-MIM – that's why we do it. They have learned new skills, and developed contacts with other librarians in their own countries and regions. Their status in their own agencies and their countries has also grown considerably.

The benefits of my involvement with GE-MIM have been great, both professionally and personally for me, and also for my parent agency. Through GBRMPA's support of a week of my time each year to attend meetings and training workshops, I come back a much more knowledgeable professional because of GE-MIM's input into my professional development. I am then able to alert my agency to innovations in marine science and information management and GBRMPA becomes aware of what's happening in the world. It has also strengthened GBRMPA's regard in international arenas of marine park management and marine science.

My experience with international engagement has added great richness to my professional life. I believe that I have made a positive difference. Some of what I have been fortunate to learn from the many that have gone before me has been passed on to others in need. It feels worthwhile.

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