Preface

The rationale for hosting a marine forum reflects not only Australia’s island status and our vast oceanic surroundings, but the work of a small, dedicated band of researchers who have brought so many of the current issues in marine and coastal environments to the surface for public comment. It is these researchers who had the floor on the day of the forum on 26 October 2002. We have presented their papers in this book, which gives the ideas raised in the forum a permanent record as well as a much wider audience. The order of the papers in this publication reflects the order of the speakers on the day. As editors, we have added an overview chapter.

While RZS forums have traditionally focused on vertebrates and terrestrially-based systems, it became apparent that the Society should broaden its scope and consider the marine environment – a subject that is often out of mind because it is out of sight. This was the rallying call for the forum and it has become the subtitle of this publication. The forum set out to explore the similarities and differences between marine and terrestrial systems, and also whether the approaches used in conserving the terrestrial environment could be applied to marine ecosystems.

The marine world is alive with a vast array of creatures collectively labeled as invertebrates, which receive special attention in this forum. However, the world’s biggest mammals, and among its most charismatic, the whales, also get a run. Thus there was no taxonomic discrimination in our endeavours to shed more light on the marine environment. The need to see and understand it is clearly demonstrated by the value that so many Australians place on the Great Barrier Reef.

As we were in the final stages of preparing this publication for the printers, an editorial appeared in the Sydney Morning Herald of 3 June 2003 under the heading: “Great Barrier gets a breather”. The first sentence of the editorial identified a major new sentiment in Australia, namely concern for the environmental stresses we are placing on our marine world and the need for government action. The sentence read: “Expansion of no-go zones for Great Barrier Reef fishing is a heartening indication of the Federal Government’s acknowledgement of the stresses on one of Australia’s best known natural icons”.

The aim of the RZS forum and this publication was to expand the horizon of concern beyond the Great Barrier Reef to all Australian marine environments.

We invited a range of speakers from a variety of government agencies, museums and universities to speak at the forum with the hope of revealing the differences and similarities between terrestrial and marine research in conceptualising the problems and in the solutions canvassed. There was also a particular focus on some of the remedies that the NSW Government is implementing. The marine environment is part of the daily life to most Australians, whether they catch a ferry across Sydney Harbour, live in seaside suburbs where cars are subject to rust through salt spray, or in coastal towns with their grand vistas of sweeping beaches and summer crowds. Remember that, of all the Australian capital cities, Canberra is the only one that is not a maritime city. We aim to convert the “rather be surfing” or “rather be sailing” car stickers to “rather be caring about the marine environment”, or at least add it as a subtitle.

The day of the marine forum was a great success. It was awash with ideas, insights and dazzlingly-focused pieces of research on environments as different as rocky shores and deep-sea mounts. The papers have been edited for the written medium and each has been subject to independent peer review. This is standard procedure for RZS publications. As editors, we wish to acknowledge the contribution of our skilled referees in this process. We also wish to thank the NSW branch of the Australian Marine Science Association for contributing half the costs of bringing Russ Babcock from Auckland University (now of CSIRO Perth) to the forum to offer an overseas perspective and an assessment of the effectiveness of the Leigh Marine Reserve in New Zealand.

Read on, dip into the text, and enjoy the marine world with its population of creatures and their researchers who devote their lives to understanding the significance of one snail jostling with another, or who are endeavouring to come to grips with the legal entanglements of the marine world that rival the many arms of an octopus.

Pat Hutchings and Daniel Lunney
Editors