

## **Background to IPMEC (from an Australian perspective)**

Harry Breidahl, January 2007

International cooperation in marine education is by no means a new thing but, in terms of this conference, both 1990 and 2000 could be regarded as key years in leading us all here to Hawaii in January 2006.

Firstly, in 1990 John Tomkin (MESA president at the time), lead a group of 23 Australian marine educators on a four week tour of marine education facilities on the west coast of the USA (Seattle to San Diego). This initial tour resulted in a number of long time associations between MESA members and members of the National Marine Educators Association (NMEA [www.marine-ed.org/](http://www.marine-ed.org/)) in North America. Many cross-cultural visits have followed the February 1990 MESA tour and these visits have exposed the challenges in both knowledge and resource sharing on the international scene.

One such visit was by a small group of MESA members to California and the NMEA 2000 conference in Longbeach (see [www.mesa.edu.au/friends/dreaming/index.html](http://www.mesa.edu.au/friends/dreaming/index.html)). It was at this conference, over breakfast, that a small group of MESA and NMEA members formed to plan an international meeting of marine educators in conjunction with the NMEA conference set down for Hawaii in 2005. Thanks to the contributions of Mike Spranger, Vicki Osis and Frannie Coopersmith in the USA and Jody Plecas, Mark Rodrigue and Harry Breidahl in Australia, this first international meeting was held in July 2005. At this meeting, the One Ocean Marine Forum (OOMF), 27 marine educators from seven nations (USA, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Canada England and South Africa) met for two days at the Maui Community College (see [www.mesa.edu.au/inter/oomf01.asp](http://www.mesa.edu.au/inter/oomf01.asp)). With Lisa Heft as facilitator this group formed six action groups. One of these action groups was the committee that has planned and facilitated this conference.

The International Pacific Marine Educators Conference (IPMEC) was seen as the next logical step in this process of exposing the challenges in knowledge and resource sharing with the specific goal of piloting the Pacific Ocean. IPMEC was originally planned to be held at the University of the South Pacific campus in Suva, Fiji. It was therefore with great regret that the conference organizing committee took the decision to relocate the conference to Honolulu as a result of the recent military coup in Fiji.