



Ceratosoma amoenum is also called the clown nudibranch:
(credits: flickr/photos/ doug.deep)



AUSTRALIA



Australia's Challenge: Undiscovered Biodiversity

Australia, lying in the southern hemisphere, is the world's largest island continent that has been isolated from other continents for millions of years. As a result, 80% of its species of flora and fauna are endemic. Approximately 83% of Australia's mammals, 85% of its flowering plants, 45% of its land birds, 90% of its reptiles and over 90% of its frogs are endemic. These high levels of endemism are not restricted to terrestrial Australia: about 85% of its inshore fish species in the southern temperate zone can only be found in Australian waters.

Australia's biodiversity makes an important contribution to the nation's economy and is regarded as an important part of the nation's heritage, as it is essential to the identity and culture of Australia's Indigenous peoples. Although conservation efforts have increased in the past years, Australian environmental assessments have found that biodiversity is in serious decline with downward trends of the conservation status of some species. A key challenge of conserving the country's biodiversity is the fact that at least 75% of Australia's native species remain undiscovered. Forty-five percent of Australia's landmass has not been fully biologically surveyed, and the vast majority of the country's exclusive economic zone is yet to be mapped and surveyed. In addition to this challenge, about 90% of native vegetation in the eastern temperate zone has been removed for human habitation, industry and transport. Almost half of the rainforests have been cleared, and land use and population pressures have had substantial impacts on the biodiversity of coastal ecosystems.

Australia is the most mega-diverse of developed countries- it has 10% of the world's known species. It also has 10% of the world's threatened species.

A major challenge of conserving Australia's biodiversity is compounded by the fact that at least 755 of its species remain undiscovered

However, the rate of vascular plant species discovery in Australia currently exceeds the rate of discovery of Amazon plant species. In the sea mounts off Tasmania, 120 previously unknown seabed mountains with a 30% rate of unknown and undescribed organisms have recently been discovered.

In order to address these conservation challenges and achieve the 2010 targets of the Convention of Biological Diversity, the Australian government has been implementing the National Strategy for the Conservation of Australia's Biological Diversity since 1996, which is supported by many Australian Government programs and policies. Much remains to be done, but with government environmental priorities in place, the future of Australia's conservation efforts heralds progress for the overall national strategy and the protection of its biodiversity.

Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity

413, Saint Jacques Street, suite 800
Montreal, Quebec, H2Y 1N9, Canada
secretariat@cbd.int

Tel.: +1 514 288 2220
Fax: +1 514 288 6588
www.cbd.int

