

# Local researchers join global project

## ■ Cassie Heil

The Ocean Tracking Network (OTN) is a Canadian-based multimillion dollar research project that aims to make use of acoustic technology to study fish migration patterns. The OTN project, based at Dalhousie University in Nova Scotia, recently signed a collaboration agreement with the South African Institute for Aquatic Biodiversity (SAIAB) who will be responsible for the deployment and maintenance of datalogging devices that will monitor ocean conditions and migrations of marine life.

These deployments will be executed in two phases. The first phase will consist of deployments in Mossel Bay and Algoa Bay, while the second phase deployments will be made in False Bay, Port Alfred, Port St Johns, Aliwal Shoal and Leven Point. Oceans Research will play a pivotal role in the success of this project and has been co-opted to assist SAIAB with the deployment of equipment, retrieval of data and servicing of the acoustic receiver array at the Mossel Bay monitoring sites.

Twenty automated data-logging receivers will be moored at fixed stations in the bay to monitor the presence of animals tagged with acoustic transmitters.

The OTN project, with a minimum lifespan

of five years, aims to address the conservation needs of numerous iconic predators and important fishery species by studying their movements and migration patterns.

While considerable focus will be placed on great white sharks in Mossel Bay, many other species including tiger sharks, ragged tooth sharks, Zambezi (bull) sharks, dusky kob, white steenbras, and leervis will be tagged at other localities around our coastline.

By the end of 2011, approximately R5 million worth of OTN telemetry equipment will be deployed in our coastal waters.

It is believed that South Africa is well positioned to contribute to this international scientific project because it possesses diverse marine flora and fauna.

Every year "the greatest shoal on earth" migrates up the east coast and now, with these oceanographic monitoring devices and acoustic receivers, scientists will get an opportunity to uncover the mysteries behind many species' migration patterns.

It will also reveal the effects of an ever changing environment on this mass migration, which will inevitably lead to more discoveries and further research.

The OTN project will galvanize the partnership between Oceans Research and the



The dedicated Oceans Research team will soon be participating in an exciting global research project.

South African Institute for Aquatic Biodiversity (SAIAB) and create further opportunities to share information regarding the cutting-edge research currently being conducted in the bay.

Furthermore, the OTN project will enhance acoustic telemetry research in South Africa and foster greater opportunities for col-

laboration and inter-disciplinary research. The local marine science community has already established the Biotelemetry Research Group, a coalition that aims to combine existing smaller scale research studies, increase communication and develop a national acoustic telemetry network that will assist in sharing information.