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Photos aid peninsula marine life study

By **Vaughan Elder**



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Images of Dunedin's coastline taken from a high-tech camera aboard the International Space Station are giving scientists a better of understanding of why the waters off Otago Peninsula are so rich in marine life.

Oregon State University research associate Nick Tuffillaro, in Dunedin as part of a visit to the University of Otago, is part of a team of researchers who are using the images to examine marine ecosystems.

The images were taken over the past three years from a first-of-its-kind camera called a "hyperspectral imager for the coastal ocean", which was installed on the International Space Station in 2009. Otago Peninsula was chosen as one of a number of areas around the world to be part of the study because it was so rich in marine life, Mr Tuffillaro said.

The images gave insight into the area's marine ecosystem by showing which parts were rich in chlorophyll - which gave the water a wispy white colour in the photos.

The levels of chlorophyll were an indication of the amount of phytoplankton in the water, which attracted fish, which in turn attracted birdlife, he said.

Information from the images was then paired with data on marine life gathered by scientists at Otago University to give a "full picture" of marine life off the Otago Peninsula.

Mr Tuffillaro hoped the research could be used to help conserve unique marine environments, like Otago Peninsula, around the world.

"We want to be good stewards of the environment and to do that we need to understand what is going on."

The camera would continue to be used to take photos of the peninsula as long as it was still in operation.

Nasa had pledged funding until 2014.

Members of the public could help by taking photos of the colour of the water off Otago Peninsula on days when an image of the peninsula was due to be taken and then sending them to images@elec.ac.nz People could find out when the peninsula was next going to be photographed from the space station by visiting the website: <http://hico.coas.oregonstate.edu/schedule/schedule.php> and searching under "BroadBay-NZ".

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Oregon State University research associate Nick Tuffillaro is part of a team of scientists studying images of Dunedin's coastline taken from space. Photo by Linda Robertson.

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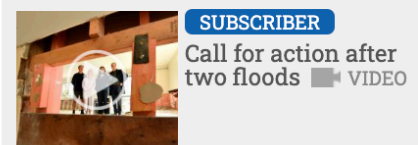
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