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## News from “The Jellyfish Jam” – Changing conditions in Barnegat Bay have likely made Sea Nettles feel quite welcome

In effort to expand their collective knowledge about sea nettles, a type of stinging jellyfish found in Barnegat Bay, the Barnegat Bay National Estuary Program and its partners, The Jacques Cousteau National Estuarine Research Reserve, the NJ Marine Sciences Consortium/New Jersey Sea Grant, and the Urban Coast Institute co-sponsored a one-day workshop, The Jellyfish Jam, on Tuesday, May 5 at Monmouth University.

Leading research scientists from the Smithsonian Institute, Yale University, Stony Brook University, Millersville University, St. Mary’s College, and Rutgers University presented an overview about the diversity of jellyfishes and other gelatinous species which are abundant in estuaries (*e.g.*, comb jellies), their roles and interactions in marine food webs, and the likely causes of the widespread population explosions (*i.e.*, blooms) observed in the mid-Atlantic and elsewhere around the globe.

The goal of the meeting was to better understand the possible causes of jellyfish population increases in other waterbodies, to explore development of a research agenda for blooms in Barnegat Bay, and to improve public outreach and education for local residents and tourists visiting Ocean County. The workshop’s take home message was that jellyfishes are increasing in many locations across the globe with diverse ecological impacts and effects on human activities, such as fishing and tourism. Perhaps more importantly, population increases in jellyfishes and other species are usually a symptom of widespread ecological changes or disturbances in marine environments. Potential causes of “jelly” blooms include reductions in fish and shellfish populations (*e.g.*, removing jellyfish predators), climate change (*e.g.*, increasing water temperatures), eutrophication (affecting phytoplankton and/or zooplankton food supplies), and an increase in the number of underwater structures, such as docks or aquaculture rafts, which provide places for jellyfish polyps to thrive.

“Sea nettles are clearly here to stay in our estuary,” said Dr. Stan Hales, Program Director for the Barnegat Bay National Estuary Program. “With this conference, we are trying to learn what, if anything, we can do to reduce nuisance blooms in the bay. Also, we would like to reduce the impacts of jellyfishes on human activities. For example, some towns in Australia use nets to create small ‘safe areas’ on beaches; volunteers ‘sweep’ beaches with nets in some Australian communities. Other towns use warning flags to inform beachgoers of local jellyfish threats. We are looking into developing a local warning network with bay and beachfront towns.”

“The conference was very informative,” said Lisa Auermuller, Watershed Coordinator for the Jacques Cousteau National Estuarine Research Reserve. “The jellyfish issue is one that the watershed community is clamoring to learn more about because jellyfish directly affect everyone’s ability to enjoy the Barnegat Bay. I now feel much better equipped to answer calls from concerned residents.”

The Barnegat Bay National Estuary Program is a partnership of federal, state, county, and local organizations working together to protect and restore the Barnegat Bay Ecosystem. It is one of 28 National Estuary Program partially funded by the US Environmental Protection Agency. BBENP is sponsored and hosted locally by Ocean County College. If you would like more information, please visit our website at [www.bbnep.org](http://www.bbnep.org) or call (732) 255-0472.