

The New York Times

Wednesday, 7 November, 2007

Seagoing Climate Experiment Begins

By : Andrew C.Revkin

The Weatherbird II, a 115-foot private research vessel, has put to sea from Florida as part of a novel — and contentious — effort to commercialize the removal of heat-trapping carbon dioxide from the atmosphere using blooms of plankton.

The ship is operated by Planktos, one of several companies seeking to profit from the global market in “carbon offsets,” credits that individuals or companies seeking to compensate for carbon dioxide emissions buy.

A lack of iron in some ocean waters prevents plankton from blooming. The company would, in essence, fertilize such areas by adding iron. But some environmental groups oppose such efforts.

The groups include the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, which threatened to block the fertilization effort this summer if it took place near the Galápagos Islands, as had been planned.

Some scientists have estimated that hundreds of millions of tons of carbon dioxide might be absorbed by fertilized seas, particularly in regions bereft of iron. But others say much more research should be conducted before commercial-scale operations begin.

The Weatherbird II entered international waters on Sunday, said Russ George, the chief executive of Planktos, but he declined to discuss its route or whether a second ship would join it in its work because of what he said were continuing threats.