“Some people call them brothel parties,” says Scott Cummins, describing the annual mass gatherings of *Aplysia* sea slugs looking for summer loving on the ocean floor. Cummins has recently identified a mix of pheromones so potent that a single teaspoon in a swimming-pool-sized tank would be enough to send the molluscs into a mating frenzy lasting days.

Based at the University of Queensland in Brisbane, Cummins likens the mix to a heady combination of Viagra and *Chanel N°5*. It’s a protein cocktail that stimulates and attracts slugs from great distances. The alluring proteins were appropriately named seductin, enticin, attractin and temptin. “Rather than boring names, we wanted to give them names that people can remember,” he explained.

Through studying the sex lives of sea slugs, Cummins hopes to learn more about reproduction in economically important marine invertebrates, such as abalone and squid. His pheromone studies, in collaboration with researchers at the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston, USA, could influence the control of pest species and the management of animals in aquaculture.

In 2002, Cummins moved to Texas to live and work on an island south of Houston. “Usually when you talk about Texas, you think about cowboys and oil, but it wasn’t really like that where I was,” he says. Instead, he found himself surrounded by an abundance of local marine life.

Cummins was lured back across the Pacific in 2007. Now, when not playing cupid with sea slugs, he takes advantage of the mostly sunny outlook in Brisbane by playing tennis or cycling along the riverside.

— Joshua Cockfield

*PHOTOGRAPHY by Vincent Long*