


Australian Government
Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts

Media Release
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Corals battling since Cook

New research to be announced at the 2009 Annual MTSRF Conference has indicated that the corals of the Great Barrier Reef became affected by human activity as soon the adjacent coast became settled by Europeans.

University of Queensland researcher Professor John Pandolfi has looked back in time to consider the effects of human activity on coral reefs since the arrival of Captain James Cook in 1770.

While there has been a lot of research into the health of the Great Barrier Reef since the 1970s, we know very little about how coral communities fared in the previous 200 years. So the Marine and Tropical Sciences Research Facility (MTSRF) has funded a team of scientists, including Prof Pandolfi, to look into the history of coral mortality along the Great Barrier Reef.

“We used high precision thermal ionisation to determine when coral skeletons throughout the Great Barrier Reef actually died,” Prof Pandolfi said.

“We found that there had been large mortality episodes that coincided with European settlement along the North Queensland coast,” he said.

“This mortality was significant in that it occurred prior to the mass bleaching episodes in 1998 and 2002, and prior to the advent of long-term monitoring,” he said.

“These recent and dramatic ecological changes in Great Barrier Reef coral communities are associated with decreased water quality and huge increases in resource exploitation, urbanisation, pollution and coastal development.”

Prof Pandolfi will present his latest findings at the 2009 Annual MTSRF Conference at 9am on Wednesday, April 29.

More than 100 scientists are presenting the results of their studies at the Conference, which is being held in Townsville at the Rydges Southbank Hotel from April 28-30.

Sheriden Morris, Managing Director of the Reef and Rainforest Research Centre – the north Queensland-based non-profit company which administers the MTSRF on behalf of the Australian Government - highlighted the role of the MTSRF in helping north Queenslanders solve environmental problems.

Reef & Rainforest RESEARCH CENTRE




"The MTSRF does not conduct research for research's sake – we specifically focus on using science to help develop solutions. This new knowledge provided by Prof Pandolfi and his team gives us a new perspective on the long-term health of the Great Barrier Reef, and new insight into management priorities," said Sheriden.

"All MTSRF results are publicly available," added Sheriden, "So we welcome public attendance at the conference - come along and learn about research relevant to your local environment."

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John Pandolfi is contactable on mobile 0400 982 301.
The 2009 RRRC Annual Conference is in Townsville at the Rydges Southbank Hotel from April 28-30.
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