MEDIA RELEASE
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Reef and Rainforest Research Centre (RRRC), Cairns
For immediate release

What to do about coral bleaching:

Reef recovery and future protection

The corals of the Great Barrier Reef undergo bleaching when they are exposed to stressful environmental conditions, including high temperatures and poor water quality.

Unfortunately, the Great Barrier Reef faces more frequent temperature stresses and water quality issues in the future.

So what can we, as Australians and custodians of the Great Barrier Reef, do to protect it against bleaching and support the recovery of those areas of the Reef that have suffered beaching?

We know from previous mass bleaching events that significant coral recovery can occur if conditions return to normal and the Reef system is healthy.

There are a wide range of efforts currently underway to improve Reef resilience and help coral recovery, including improving Reef water quality, controlling populations of the coral-eating Crown of Thorns Starfish and protecting the biodiversity of the Reef ecosystem.

The Australian Government's National Environmental Science Programme includes a Tropical Water Quality Hub, based in Cairns. This Hub funds multiple projects to monitor and improve the quality of water entering into the Great Barrier Reef, and its

researchers are working closely with farmers and other land users to reduce levels of sediment, pesticides and fertiliser in agricultural run-off.

The Australian Institute of Marine Science, James Cook University and the University of Queensland are partnering to research the ability of individual corals to increase their temperature threshold by preferentially hosting the zooxanthellae that are more tolerant of high temperatures. Research is also being carried out on the adaptation of coral communities to higher water temperatures through natural selection.

The implementation of no-take and reduced-take fishing zones on the Great Barrier Reef has helped sustain fish biodiversity. This higher level of fish biodiversity enables protected zones to recover faster after a mass bleaching event, Crown of Thorns Starfish outbreak or damage from a storm or cyclone. Research from the Australian Institute of Marine Science shows that recovery of corals within a protected zone is over 30% faster than coral is a zone open to full extraction activities.

Controlling the plague of the coral-eating Crown of Thorns Starfish is also an essential step to build Reef resilience. The current Australian Government control program has removed over 400,000 Crown of Thorns Starfish from the Reef, with monitoring showing that control has been effective in protecting key high-value tourism sites. Recent advances in the approach to starfish control are expected to deliver effective protection across larger areas of the Great Barrier Reef.

By coordinating these efforts through continued engagement with everyone involved in the health of the Great Barrier Reef - tour operators, Traditional Owners, recreational and commercial fishers, farmers, ports, industry, researchers and the public - alongside efforts to address climate change, we can make a positive difference to the future of the Great Barrier Reef.

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