



## Divers graduate after joining the fight against Crown of Thorns Starfish

The latest class of divers trained to control outbreaks of the coral-eating Crown of Thorns Starfish will be entering the workforce with an arsenal of specialized skills after graduating at a ceremony in Cairns today.

The divers, many of whom come from disadvantaged backgrounds, have just completed a six-month program combining dive tourism training with hands-on work culling Crown of Thorns Starfish from reefs as far south as Mission Beach.

Crown of Thorns Starfish outbreaks are a major cause of coral death, with a fully-grown Crown of Thorns capable of eating more than a square metre of live coral in a single day.

Divers cull the starfish with injections of a compound made from the bile of sheep and other animals.

Today's graduates join several other classes that have passed through the Crown of Thorns Starfish Control Program, which is run by the combined efforts of Association of Marine Park Tourism Operators (AMPTO) and the Reef and Rainforest Research Centre (RRRC) on behalf of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, with funding from the Australian and Queensland governments.

AMPTO trains the divers and carries out control operations with a fleet of three vessels, while RRRC guides their efforts with cutting-edge research and management plans funded through the National Environmental Science Programme's (NESP) Tropical Water Quality Hub.

RRRC managing director Sheriden Morris said combining NESP science and AMPTO's well-trained divers was critical to protecting the Great Barrier Reef from Crown of Thorns Starfish.

"Knowing where and when the major aggregations of starfish are going to occur means that the dive teams can be there dealing with that outbreak instead of looking somewhere else," she said.

"Their catch-per-unit effort has dramatically increased recently as we have improved our knowledge of the causes and dynamics of Crown-of-Thorns outbreaks."

AMTPO Project Manager Steven Moon OAM agreed, saying the diver teams had removed over 80,000 Crown of Thorns Starfish in the last two months.

“The Integrated Pest Management approach developed by the Tropical Water Quality Hub guides our control efforts and has contributed to an increase in our overall efficiency by enabling us to target populations at specific areas before they reach plague proportions,” he said.

The graduate divers are now well-equipped for jobs in Cairns’ reef tourism industry, receiving a Certificate III in Tourism and Operational Diving.

Many past graduates have gone on to become dive masters and instructors in Far North Queensland and as far away as Thailand.

**ENDS**

**Media contact:**

Boyd Robertson: (07) 4050 7400 / 04 5814 4909 / [boyd.robertson@rrrc.org.au](mailto:boyd.robertson@rrrc.org.au)