

MEDIA RELEASE

Monday, 29/06/2015

Reef and Rainforest Research Centre (RRRC), Cairns

For immediate release

RRRC welcomes funding to fight coral-eating monster starfish

The Reef and Rainforest Research Centre (RRRC) is welcoming the announcement of \$7 million to control populations of the coral-eating Crown of Thorns Starfish (COTS) on the Great Barrier Reef.

The Australian Government's Reef Trust program, which is committed to delivering on-the-ground improvements to Reef health, is providing the funding over three years to the RRRC.

This will allow the RRRC's COTS control program to target populations not only at popular dive sites but also key 'spreader' reefs, where the starfish gather in huge numbers.

RRRC managing director Sheriden Morris welcomed the announcement.

"This announcement of this funding is extremely positive news for the COTS control program," she said.

"RRRC is working with the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, tourism operators, recreational fishers, farmers and many other stakeholders to protect the Great Barrier Reef from COTS damage."

Outbreaks of Crown of Thorns Starfish are believed to be responsible for over half the coral loss on the Reef in the last 30 years.

Each starfish is protected by poisonous spines, grows to the size of a dinner plate and can eat six square metres of coral a year.

Although a native species, human activity has caused huge outbreaks of COTS over the past several decades, with millions of the starfish forming plagues across northern sections of the Great Barrier Reef and threatening its world-famous natural beauty and biodiversity.

Sheriden said the funding allowed new strategies to be deployed when combating COTS.

“This represents an evolution to an Integrated Pest Management approach similar to those used for land-based pests like locusts,” Sheriden said.

“We are developing a four-tier program that includes intensive surveillance and early detection of potential COTS outbreaks and the strategic targeting of populations at vulnerable points in their life cycle - such as during the breeding and larval stages at spreader reefs and at key sites on the Reef.”

“We are also linking COTS control to programs that manage nutrient runoff from coastal agriculture.”

Anyone can get involved with helping control COTS outbreaks.

Training in surveillance, identification, control and reporting is available to any members of the tourist, fishing, diving, photographic or collection industries, who are encouraged to help protect our Great Barrier Reef by getting involved in the COTS control program.

For more information contact the RRRC COTS project coordinator Anne Clark on 0418 772380 or at anne.clarke@rrrc.org.au.

The RRRC is a Cairns-based environmental non-government organisation that manages and directs environmental protection projects in the Great Barrier Reef, Wet Tropics Rainforest, Torres Strait and more.

ENDS

Media Contact: Boyd Robertson - 04 5814 4909