

MEDIA RELEASE

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Reef and Rainforest Research Centre - Cairns, Australia

For immediate release



Key tourism sites escape major bleaching damage: report

Recent reports about the extent and impact of the recent mass coral bleaching event have caused serious public confusion about the condition of the Great Barrier Reef.

A combined task force consisting staff from the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA), Queensland National Parks and the Association of Marine Park Tourism Operators (AMPTO) conducted a detailed bleaching survey on key reefs off Cairns last week.

The task force conducted 133 survey dives on nine reefs between Cairns and Port Douglas.

Although it is too early to determine the full impact of the bleaching on the corals, the survey found the average level of bleaching-induced coral mortality in the surveyed area was 13.7%.

This survey highlights the 'patchiness' of the bleaching impact: while some of the reefs may have experienced higher mortality, other reefs are entirely unaffected. For example, Low Isles, Fitzroy and Moore Reefs have very low levels of coral mortality.

Reefs south of Port Douglas were found to have a coral mortality level of less than 5%.

The Great Barrier Reef is made up of approximately 2,990 individual reefs. The northern sector of the Great Barrier Reef, containing about 700 reefs, has been the most impacted by bleaching.

The 987 reefs of the central section (south of Port Douglas) have experienced moderate to minor impacts from bleaching and the 1,313 reefs in the southern sector (Mackay south) have received very little bleaching at all.

This survey is important as it shows the central reefs of the Great Barrier Reef, which include the key tourism reefs of Cairns and Whitsundays, have escaped the worst of the bleaching and still continue to offer attractive experiences to tourists.

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Media contact:

Boyd Robertson – 04 5814 4909 / boyd.robertson@rrrc.org.au