



Media Release

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Global Coral Reef Project – Proactive Response to Bad News

The news from the Royal Society's latest report is not good, but there is better news on the horizon with the mobilisation of scientists through the global Coral Reef Targeted Research & Capacity Building for Management (CRTR) Project.

In the wake of Britain's peak scientific body, Royal Society's, new report warning of the dire consequences of greenhouse gas emissions on the world's marine life, the CRTR Project has indicated it is collaboratively researching to provide practical information and management tools to coral reef managers.

The CRTR Project is a global program involving more than 70 scientists and four Centres of Excellence in Australia, Mexico, Philippines and Tanzania. It has funding of more than AUD\$23m in cash and AUD\$70m in-kind support, including from the Global Environment Facility, World Bank and the University of Queensland,

Prof. Ove Hoegh-Guldberg, Chair of the CRTR Project's Australasian Centre of Excellence and an Australian expert involved in the Royal Society study said that it was important to now 'respond to this alarming situation by getting out there and trying to find the solutions'.

He said the Royal Society report is a great way to help everyone involved in marine science to identify our priorities and these needs to be acted upon.

'The CRTR Project is an excellent vehicle to fill the gaps in the science and identify solutions so management and policy decisions can be strengthened around the world', he said.

Prof. Hoegh-Guldberg says the problem is with the increasing amounts of carbon dioxide that are being released into the atmosphere from the burning of fossil fuels that have already increased the temperature of the earth. Rising atmospheric carbon dioxide has also begun to detectably acidify the oceans.

The Royal Society report *Ocean acidification due to increasing atmospheric carbon dioxide* shows that the rising acidity of our oceans is yet another reason for us to be concerned about the carbon dioxide we are pumping into the atmosphere.

Professor John Raven, Chair of the Royal Society Working Group on Ocean Acidification said 'Our world leaders meeting at next week's G8 summit must commit to taking decisive and significant action to cut carbon dioxide emissions.'

'Failure to do so may mean that there is no place in the oceans of the future for many of the species and ecosystems that we know today'.¹

The Royal Society's working group called for evidence last year on how this change in the acidity of the ocean will affect the function of the world's oceans. It has been working on this evidence and has come to conclusion that there are some serious issues facing the world's marine life as the oceans acidify.

The world's coral reefs are expected to face huge problems as oceans acidify and concentration of key chemical species in seawater drastically decline. Prof Hoegh-Guldberg said that corals face two problems from rising carbon dioxide.

The first is the warming caused by the greenhouse effect and the second is the acidification of seawater by carbon dioxide, which will eventually stop them forming their limestone skeletons.

He said 'both issues spell big problems for coral and coral reefs and this is one of the key factors causing coral bleaching, which is one of six research areas of the CRTR Project'.

The extensive global decline of coral reefs now risks contributing to the environmental and economic instability of many coastal nations, many of them developing countries.

Coral reefs directly support an estimated 100 million people worldwide and are also responsible for tourist income to countries like Australia, where The Great Barrier Reef alone is responsible for over \$2.5 billion tourism dollars to the Australian economy each year.

'So while ocean acidification is bad news, the good news is that through the global CRTR Project we are working on it and other issues affecting coral reef ecosystems.

But Prof. Hoegh-Guldberg stresses that 'all the good work will be for nothing if the richest nations of the world do not get the CO₂ emissions under control and there is a perfect opportunity to work on this at the G8 meeting next week'.

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¹ Royal Society Media Release *Cuts in Carbon Dioxide Emissions vital to stem rising acidity of oceans says Royal Society*, 11AM BST Thursday, 30 June 2005

For more information:

General Information on the CRTR Project: www.gefcoral.org

The Coral Reef Targeted Research & Capacity Building for Management Project is a 15-year project to be run in three phases. The first phase, which commenced in December 2004, will run for five years.

The initial aim of the program will be to fill the knowledge gaps about coral reefs by focusing on six targeted research themes:

1. Bleaching and Local Ecological Factors
2. Connectivity and Large-Scale Ecological Processes
3. Diseases
4. Restoration and Remediation
5. Remote Sensing
6. Modelling and Decision Support

The impetus for the project was a particularly bad bleaching event in 1998 that saw 16% of the world's coral wiped out.

Call for Evidence: <http://www.royalsoc.ac.uk/page.asp?tip=1&id=2557>

Royal Society: <http://www.royalsoc.ac.uk/>

Photographs for use with this article: www.marine.uq.edu.au/ohg/acid/

Contact: Prof Ove Hoegh-Guldberg at oveh@uq.edu.au , or by phone via +61 7 3365 1156 (Veronica Westacott, Project Officer)