MEDIA RELEASE
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NEW TOOL HELPS COMMUNITIES PROTECT THEIR REEFS

Coastal communities and policy makers around the world can now use a sophisticated model to predict the impact of coastal developments and climate change on their coral reefs and coastal environments. The model will be used in planning to allow sustainable development and protect their reefs.

The new "Reefs for People" tool was launched today at the International Waters Conference in Cairns, Australia. It demonstrates how the social, economic and biological information from a local situation can generate relevant models to inform decisions.

The tool contains a series of models based on parameters for the Philippines and the Mesoamerican Barrier Reef, but can be adapted to use in other locations worldwide. It is the result of five years of work by the Modelling & Decision Support Group (MDSWG) of the Coral Reef Targeted Research & Capacity Building for Management (CRTR) Program. It is accessible via www.reefutures.org and a demonstration CD is now available.

MDSWG Chair Professor Roger Bradbury said the user-friendly tool will help planners, governments, property developers, managers of reefs, non-government organisations and reef scientists understand how models may be used to predict the impact of human activity, coastal development and climate change on their coral reefs.

"This is a sophisticated tool which can be easily tailored for any of the world's coral reefs and which allows users to take a strategic and long-term view of their coral reefs and explore a range of scenarios they might face at both the local and regional levels," Prof Bradbury said.

"For example, it will enable planners to predict economic and conservation consequences of coastal development, and ensure any development undertaken is sustainable. As well as demonstrating any negative consequences, it will open up a range of sustainable possibilities.

"It is also provides policy makers with a public, transparent way to demonstrate they have given proper consideration of the impact of their decisions."

Prof Bradbury said modelling is an important management technology to allow decision makers and reef users to see the dynamics of the whole reef system – including ecological, biophysical and socio-economic aspects.

"Overfishing, water pollution, coastal development, coral bleaching, climate change – all these factors and more impact on coral reefs reducing their value to coastal people," he said.

The latest version of the model can be accessed via www.reefutures.org Copies of the CD can be ordered from www.gefcoral.org High resolution photographs are available.

The CRTR Program is a leading international coral reef research initiative that provides a coordinated approach to scientifically-proven knowledge for improved coral reef management.

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