

*MEDIA RELEASE*

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*Reef and Rainforest Research Centre (RRRC), Cairns*

*For immediate release*



## Tropical Water Quality Hub to help keep Reef clear of plastic rubbish

A Far North Queensland-based environmental research hub will lend a hand in reducing the amount of plastic rubbish choking the Great Barrier Reef.

Australians dump more than 14,000 tons of plastic waste into the ocean every year - this results in up to six pieces of plastic rubbish settling on every metre of Australian coastline.

Plastic objects can also break down into 'microplastics' - tiny fragments of plastic that are swallowed by and choke coral polyps and other marine organisms.

Fully one third of turtles that wash up on Australian shores have ingested plastic, along with 65 per cent of seabirds globally.

To tackle this problem, the Australian Government is funding two major science hubs within the National Environmental Science Programme (NESP).

The Marine Biodiversity Hub, based out of Hobart, is developing a project to reduce the amount of plastic entering Australia's waterways by analysing sources of rubbish and then identifying 'pinch-points' where waste can be intercepted.

Assisting them will be the Tropical Water Quality Hub, managed by the Reef and Rainforest Research Centre (RRRC) in Cairns.

Tropical Water Quality Hub leader Damien Burrows said plastic waste was an emerging threat to the health of the Great Barrier Reef.

"Broken-down bits of plastic, which we call microplastics, are a very big problem for turtles, seabirds, corals and other marine ecosystems because of how long they remain in the system and how much damage they do while they are in it, the impacts of which are well-documented," he said.

RRRC managing director Sheriden Morris said the public would be a vital source of information for the project.

"We're very fortunate to have support from the Australian Government on finding ways to deal with these problems," she said.

"This is a great opportunity for the community, who are concerned about the protection of the Reef, to directly engage with helping solve this problem.

"This approach is called 'citizen science' and it's about everyone coming together to help look after the health of our Great Barrier Reef."

Federal Member for Leichhardt Warren Entsch said he was very aware of the dangers that plastics pose to fragile coastal ecosystems.

"Heidi Taylor and Tangaroa Blue, supported by volunteers, do fantastic work clearing and sorting tonnes of rubbish from beaches at Fitzroy Island through to Cape Kimberley in the Daintree and the western reaches of Cape York," Mr Entsch said.

"Through this new research, the Tropical Water Quality Hub will be able to help pin-point where this rubbish is coming from and hopefully divert it to appropriate waste treatment and recycling facilities.

"It's a very worthwhile project and I look forward to hearing how Far Northerners can help."

**ENDS**

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