



RRRC partners with local tour company to show reef recovery to decision-makers

Decision-makers involved in the Australian government's National Environmental Science Program (NESP) saw the recovery of corals on the Great Barrier Reef first-hand last week courtesy of a local tourism operator.

The group, which included representatives from the Australian and Queensland Governments, the agricultural industries, the Reef and Rainforest Research Centre (RRRC) and senior researchers, serve as the Steering Committee of the NESP Tropical Water Quality Hub, a \$32 million Australian Government research fund focused on improving water quality in the Great Barrier Reef.

Hub manager RRRC organised the trip with the Frankland Islands Reef Cruises to transport the NESP committee down the rainforest-lined Russell River, then out for a snorkel tour of the Frankland Islands' fringing reefs about 10 kilometres from the mainland. These reefs were hit particularly hard during the 2016 and 2017 mass bleaching events but are now showing very positive signs of recovery from bleaching in addition to the growth of new juvenile corals.

Steering Committee Chair Leith Bouilly said she was 'excited to see so much recovery' at the reefs.

"It really shows that if the right conditions are there, the coral can recover," she said.

"The more we do to improve the water quality, the greater that recovery will be."

RRRC Managing Director Sheriden Morris said while impacts from climate change, poor water quality and other issues are a real threat to the Great Barrier Reef, the system is resilient and can recover from damage if those pressures are reduced by 'world-class management efforts'.

"We were pleased to have the opportunity to show the Hub Steering Committee members the extent of coral recovery and amazing fish life of the Frankland Islands, and the work that is being done by the Hub researchers in partnership with farmers, tourism operators and the local community to assist this recovery," she said.

“We’re also very thankful to Frankland Island Reef Cruises, who are a longstanding local tour group that are providing these great trips with local knowledge for 20 years.”

Frankland Island Reef Cruises co-owner Elouise Collins hopes the trip would help counter media narratives about the supposed death of the entire Great Barrier Reef.

Ms Collins, an environmental scientist with 15 years’ experience, said that the international discussion on the health of the Great Barrier Reef had failed to include enough detail on corals’ ability to resist and recover from damage.

“People have been led to believe that the entire reef is dying, but anyone with an inkling of the science understands that corals can change and adapt – the reef is clearly not dead,” she said.

The trip also included a visit to an automatic water sampling site on Behana Creek at Aloomba which is part of a program funded by the Hub to carry out fine-scale water quality monitoring in the Russell-Mulgrave catchment in cooperation with local cane farmers.

More information on the NESP Tropical Water Quality Hub is available at nesptropical.edu.au.



Decision-makers from the Australian Government’s National Environmental Science Program visiting the Frankland Islands to inspect reef recovery. Image: Boyd Robertson, RRRC



Then and now: corals around the Frankland Islands were severely affected during the 2016 & 2017 mass bleaching events (left). While many corals died at that time, the many survivors are now thriving, making the Frankland Islands an excellent snorkelling experience for visitors to the Great Barrier Reef.

Images: Suzanne Long, RRRC

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