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SCIENTIFIC SURVEYS OF TORRES STRAIT REEFS TO START THIS MONTH

The Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) has welcomed the start this month of the first in a series of scientific coral reef health surveys in the region.

The baseline surveys will be conducted by Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS) researchers who will also be providing hands on training for TSRA Rangers. The project will identify critical gaps in the knowledge of 'what is out there', 'what's unique' and the reefs relationships to fisheries and other resources.

The project led by the Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS) is funded from the Australian Government's National Environmental Research Program.

The TSRA Chairperson, Mr Joseph Elu, said the surveys would provide highly important baselines for monitoring the health of Torres Strait reef systems for generations to come.

"This level of coral reef research effort has in the past been focused on the Great Barrier Reef and for the first time in coming months we will start the process in having a detailed report card on the health status of the all important reefs in the Torres Strait.

"While most of us believe the reefs are still in relatively good shape we still need to be aware of the threats.

"Climate change, crown of thorns starfish, disease, storms, and pollution from river runoff and shipping pose ongoing threats to the reefs which are the foundation stone of our lifestyle and economy.

"It is therefore important to keep an eye on them and be in a position to respond when potential threats are recognised."

Mr Elu said the surveys would follow the setting up last year of a network of sea surface temperature data loggers surrounding islands in the Torres Strait.

"This work is part of a long-term monitoring project which supports a local community based approach to monitoring.

"The data loggers automatically record temperature and tidal depth around Booby, Cherepo, Dugong, Moa (Kubin), Mabuia, Boigu, Iama, Warraber, Twin and Mer Islands as well as Woiz Reef and Bramble Cay.

“They will help us understand trends and patterns in sea temperature, especially during the summer when corals are often stressed.

“Together with a real-time observing station at Madge Reef near Thursday island, they are also part of early warning and monitoring system for coral bleaching.”

Mr Elu said the project was a great example of collaboration between AIMS , TSRA and the communities.



Caption: The chartered marine research vessel MV Floreat will be used by Researchers and TSRA Rangers to check the health of reefs in the Torres Strait. (Higher resolution image available).

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