

Media Release **No. 547**

For immediate release

STUDY FINDS NINE CORAL SPECIES IN THE TORRES STRAIT UNIQUE TO AUSTRALIAN WATERS

Recent marine research recorded almost one hundred species of corals for the first time in the Torres Strait and nine that were not previously known to live in Australian waters.

The Land and Sea Management Unit of the Torres Strait Regional Authority's (TSRA) Environmental Management Program, in partnership with the Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS) and the Queensland Museum, identified 279 coral species and 301 species of reef fish in the Torres Strait.

The project was jointly funded by AIMS and the Australian Government's National Environmental Research Program.

"We expected to find a lot of species on these reefs and the more we have looked the more we have found," Dr Hugh Sweatman from AIMS said.

The communities of coral and reef fish differed at central sites from those at eastern sites.

Scientists also found an abundance of temperature-sensitive corals on the southeastern reef flat at Mer, which have decreased in population size since they were first described 100 years ago.

Mer Island is the only survey location where diseases of corals are common in the region.

It is also where the coral-feeding crown-of-thorns starfish was first collected from the reef flat in 1913, which were also recorded on neighbouring reefs in the recent 2013 surveys.

TSRA Chairman, Mr Joseph Elu, said he was pleased with the results of the research project.

"The project has increased the capacity of rangers to participate in the reef monitoring alongside scientists and better understand our local marine environment and the importance of continuing to care for this natural asset," Mr Elu said.

Reefs at Mer, Poruma, Aureed, Masig and Erub islands were surveyed and results are reported in a [Preliminary Report on Surveys of Biodiversity of Fishes and Corals in Torres Strait](#).

The TSRA's Environmental Management Program continues to monitor and assess coral reef health and marine biodiversity in partnership with AIMS.

ENDS

TSRA Media Contact – Bruce Nelson 0423 403 449



Caption: TSRA Ranger Troy Stow records a unique coral find