

MEDIA RELEASE

\$500,000 Grant to Protect Coral Reefs from Crown of Thorns Starfish

THURSDAY 12 JUNE 2014

The Australian Museum's Lizard Island Research Station will take the lead in controlling the devastating impact of Crown of Thorns Starfish (COTS) on the Great Barrier Reef with \$500,000 in research grants to study COTS outbreaks.

COTS outbreaks are the single biggest cause of coral loss on the Great Barrier Reef (GBR) with up to 400 of the 2,200 reefs infested.

To investigate solutions for widespread control and the prevention of future outbreaks, the Australian Museum will offer grants for established researchers, reef managers and industry specialists to undertake work at the museum's Lizard Island Research Station (LIRS).

LIRS Co-director, Lyle Vail, said he was thrilled to support vital research aimed at controlling COTS outbreaks which have had a catastrophic effect on many reefs in the Indo-Pacific.

"COTS have up to 21 large arms covered in venomous spines. They feast on coral, sucking the tissue of all nutrients and colour and leaving a stark, white skeleton – all within one to three hours," he said.

"This, combined with their phenomenal reproductive potential – each starfish is capable of producing about 60 million eggs in a single season – makes them an incredibly destructive and rampant predator that can move in and kill entire reefs in a matter of weeks or months."

Scientists estimate that the GBR has had a 50% reduction in living coral cover since 1986 with 40% of that reduction attributed to COTS plagues and the rest due largely to major storms.

The Lizard Island Reef Research Foundation (LIRRF) was awarded the \$500,000 in COTS research funding earlier this week as part of The Ian Potter 50th Anniversary Commemorative Grants program.

LIRRF Trustee, Charlie Shuetrim AM, thanked The Ian Potter Foundation and said he was pleased to have secured the funding that will facilitate scientists to better understand how to manage the growing COTS epidemic.

"LIRS is uniquely placed to respond to the challenge of controlling COTS given its location adjacent to where outbreaks originate, its world-class research facilities and its demonstrated track record in supporting innovative research," he said.

"In this critical time for reef health, we are very excited to have received this commemorative grant that has the potential to be so important to the future of Australia's Great Barrier Reef and indeed coral reefs around the world."

Expressions of Interest for the first round of grants will take place in September 2014 with recipients announced in January 2015. Grants will be awarded over the next four years with the first round running from April 2015 to March 2016.

For more information on LIRS, please visit <http://australianmuseum.net.au/Lizard-Island-Research-Station/>.



Australian Museum
6 College Street
Sydney NSW 2010 Australia
t 61 2 9320 6000
australianmuseum.net.au

Opening hours
9:30am – 5pm seven days a week

Cost
\$15 adults
\$8.00 child/ concession/ seniors
\$38 family ticket
(2 adults, 2 children)
FREE for children under 5 years



MEDIA CONTACTS

Michelle Van Doninck, Publicist t 61 2 9320 6181 m 0421 617 019 e michelle.vandoninck@austrmus.gov.au

Claire Vince, Publicist t 61 2 9320 6181 m 0468 726 910 e claire.vince@austrmus.gov.au