

Tsunami assessment team sees minimal impact in the Maldives

The specialist Australian marine science taskforce recently sent to the Maldives to help gauge the effects of the recent tsunami on marine systems have reported surprisingly little damage.

John Gunn of CSIRO Marine Research, who led the one-off delegation from the Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS), the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, James Cook University, AusAID, and CSIRO Marine Research, said that apart from damage to buildings and interruptions to livelihoods on the islands, impacts on marine and land systems had been minimal.

'At the end of our 17-day mission the Maldivian Government had a clean bill of health in terms of their islands and their reefs and I think we

left there with them feeling much better than they did before we arrived,' he said.

'The Maldives didn't suffer from the large wave events that we saw graphically in news services out of Thailand and Sumatra and the like,' Dr Gunn told media. 'One of the quite amazing, oft-repeated comments from people as we were talking to them was that there was no wave, they really felt like their islands were sinking.'

Assessments were made harder by the early stages of recovery of the reef systems from the massive global bleaching event in 1998, where 98 per cent of the Maldivian reefs died. The effect of the tsunami on rates of coral recovery from the bleaching is still being considered.

The team was also hampered



Maldivians unload reconstruction material to repair tsunami-damaged buildings. The Maldives sit just a metre above sea level in the Indian Ocean, south-west of Sri Lanka. CSIRO Marine Research

by a lack of historical data for the region. This has led to recommendations that better marine science capability and a marine reserve network be urgently established to safe-

guard the future of the reef ecosystems so essential to the Maldives.

More information:
www.marine.csiro.au

More Perth residents TravelSmart

Western Australia continues with its encouraging and proactive assessment of sustainable alternatives. The Department for Planning and Infrastructure's Director General, Greg Martin, recently announced the results of a TravelSmart programme trial in the Perth suburb of Armadale, where more than 7000 residents took part, showing their commitment to exploring transport alternatives.

Mr Martin said 'the Armadale community reduced the number of car journeys by 9 per cent over the year, or 6 million kilometres. That means, on average, around one trip each week where drivers have stopped to think about alternative transport options instead of reaching straight for the car keys.

'Add to that a 45 per cent increase in walking trips, 29 per cent increase in cycling and 18 per cent increase in public transport use.' At this rate Armadale residents enjoy an extra 120 000 hours of physical exercise and moderate greenhouse gas emissions by around 1800 tonnes of carbon dioxide.



TravelSmart programmes have changed attitudes to transport alternatives. Perth's cyclists are now supported by an increasing bike path network. Courtesy of TravelSmart Australia

'These results follow similar successes in South Perth and Cambridge, Marangaroo, Subiaco, Melville, Fremantle and Vincent. Full results are expected shortly for a TravelSmart project in Belmont where bus ticket sales are already 10 per cent higher due to public awareness created by the program,' Mr Martin said.

'Annually, TravelSmart has shown us that we can travel up to 100 million fewer kilometres by car, we can reduce greenhouse gas emissions by an estimated 33 000 tonnes, and we can enjoy something like 1.7 million extra hours of physical activity by walking and cycling. That's a huge benefit to the community and we've shown it's achievable,' he said.

Other positive outcomes have included reductions in car-running costs and traffic congestion, less pollution, fewer greenhouse gas emissions, and reduced pressure on health care thanks to a more active community.

'The success of TravelSmart is directly linked to the government's commitment to expanding Perth's rail travel options, improving our bicycle network and advancing transport-oriented development to help connect suburbs with the rest of the community.'

Based on its success to date, the TravelSmart programme has been adopted interstate and internationally, including in the United States and parts of Europe and the United Kingdom.

More information: www.travelsmart.gov.au