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Australia's leadership chance on marine protection areas

The head of the internationally renowned ARC Centre of Excellence for Coral Reef Studies (CoECRS) in Townsville says that Australia can leverage its leading research on the effectiveness of marine 'no-take' zones to increase commitment to establishing and managing more vital marine reserves.



Credit: Nature Conservancy/ARC Centre of Excellence

Professor Terry Hughes, the director of ARC CoECRS, says 'Over recent years Australian scientists have gathered a mass of evidence that no-take marine reserves result in increases in fish numbers and fish sizes, with major benefits to the whole ecosystem. The science is in – and the results are clear for all to see.'

'Given that global fishing effort is going up all the time, and there is uncontrolled plundering of fish stocks on the high seas by 'pirate fishers', there are grounds for serious concern about the state of the oceans and sea life. This underscores the importance of Australia continuing to show international leadership in protecting marine ecosystems,' Prof. Hughes says.

Prof. Hughes is urging State and Federal to lift Australia's commitment to establishing and managing marine reserves based on the scientific evidence – particularly in the biodiverse Coral Triangle, directly north of Australia.

'The Australian government is emerging as a global leader in managing marine ecosystems. It is a global contribution we can be extremely proud of - but much more remains to be done,' Prof. Hughes said.

'By establishing the world's largest no-take area in the Coral Sea Conservation Zone, we would both be setting an international example – and also protecting the adjoining Great Barrier Reef Marine Park for the future.'

Prof Hughes said the Coral Sea Conservation Zone is an important source of both coral and fish larvae to recharge the Great Barrier Reef area. Looking after these fabulous places now, is all the more important to build their resilience to the impact of future climate change.

'We need networks of protected areas which can assure the resilience of sea life under changed conditions of sea temperature, acidity, storms, pollution and so on.'

'If you leave a portion of the fish population alone, they grow larger and more numerous, and they have more babies to rebuild depleted stocks – and that benefits everyone, including fishers, tourism operators and the ecosystem,' he says.

'Fish are ecological engineers – they play a huge role in maintaining healthy ocean ecosystems. By preserving fish stocks, we protect the entire ecosystem and how it works.'

Prof. Hughes will be elaborating on the science and need for marine protected areas as convenor of 'Coral Reefs: Coast to Coast Symposium' to be held in Fremantle, WA, on October 20-21.

The CoERCS underpins Australia's leading contribution to coral reef sciences, and fosters stronger collaborative links between the major partners and 24 other leading institutions in nine countries.

Source: SciNews

Read also: Reef Collapse Threshold Identified

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