



Australian Government

**Great Barrier Reef
Marine Park Authority**

MEDIA STATEMENT

13 January 2011

Flood plume impacts on the Reef

The flood plume event from the Fitzroy, Burnett and Mary Rivers is currently affecting the Great Barrier Reef in the inshore areas particularly off the Capricorn Coast near Rockhampton.

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority is continuing to map the extent of the flood plumes.

"This current situation is not affecting popular tourism locations in the Whitsundays, Cairns or Port Douglas regions, and we've been informed that Capricorn Coast marine tourism operators are operating as well," GBRMPA General Manager of Marine Park Management Andrew Skeat said.

"Even when ecosystems are exposed to freshwater plumes they do not necessarily die. Many plants and animals have mechanisms to cope with low salinity and low light," Mr Skeat said.

"However, this event has unusually large amounts of flood runoff with suspended material and the prevailing conditions may be different to previous events.

"Through the Australian Government's \$10.5 million Reef Rescue Marine Monitoring Program we have been working with a range of organisations to collect and test water quality samples.

"Our partners include James Cook University, CQ University, Australian Institute of Marine Science and Queensland's Department of Environment and Resource Management.

"The samples are being tested for salinity, turbidity, temperature and pesticides. It will be some time before we know the full extent of damage caused by the flood plume."

Some of the potential impacts of flood runoff include freshwater bleaching of shallow corals, increased algal blooms and coral disease caused by high sediment and nutrient loads.

"The inundation of freshwater can also increase the productivity of some inshore species, causing increased breeding in fish species such as mangrove jack and barramundi, and some prawns and sponges," Mr Skeat said.

The marine monitoring program is a part of the \$200 million Reef Rescue Program, which aims to improve the water quality of the Great Barrier Reef by increasing land management practices that reduce the run-off of nutrients, pesticides and sediments.

Ends

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