

## Media Release

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### **\$3.4million partnership to support reef research**

A new community-business partnership will support a comprehensive study of life on Australia's coral reefs. BHP Billiton, the Great Barrier Reef Foundation and the Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS) have developed a partnership which will allow three Australian reef sites to be studied as part of **CReefs**, a global research initiative, to document and assess the diversity of coral reef ecosystems.

Over a four year period, this \$A3.4 million project will enable marine scientists and taxonomists to collect and identify samples during a series of field trips to the Great Barrier Reef's Heron and Lizard Islands and Ningaloo Reef in Western Australia.

BHP Billiton's Group Executive and Chief Executive Ferrous and Coal, Marcus Randolph said BHP Billiton's investment will support the documenting of coral reef biodiversity and identification of issues to be addressed to safeguard critical biodiversity heritage.

"We are delighted to make such an important contribution to advancing science's understanding of coral reef biodiversity which will lead to sustainable management and preservation, of our coral reefs. This project strongly aligns with the company's business and forms part of our commitment to invest 1% of our pre-tax profits globally on social and environmental programs", Mr Randolph said.

Great Barrier Reef Foundation Chief Executive Judy Stewart said the partnership has delivered urgently needed private funding into the reef research sector.

"Coral reefs are the most diverse and biologically complex marine ecosystems in the world and they are also under threat," she said.

"Understanding coral reef biodiversity is critical to securing their future. We need to understand how reefs operate in order to protect and preserve them. Accelerating that effort is the Foundation's first priority and the private sector's investment in this effort is both timely and important.

"Australian reefs are rich in biodiversity and are hugely valuable storehouses of information. To exclude them from a study of the world's coral reefs would be unthinkable," Mrs Stewart said.

Launched in late 2005, *CReefs* ([www.creefs.org](http://www.creefs.org)) is the coral reef component of the Census of Marine Life ([www.coml.org](http://www.coml.org)), a global network of researchers in more than 80 nations engaged in a ten year initiative to assess and explain the diversity, distribution, and abundance of marine life in oceans - past, present, and future.

AIMS Chief Executive Officer Dr Ian Poiner said the partnership has ensured that data from Australian reefs will be included in the global census.

"Scientists estimate that less than 10 per cent of life on coral reefs has been identified. CReefs is a major research effort to sample, analyse and document marine life on our reefs," he said.

"This collaboration will also improve scientists' access to existing data and information about coral reef biodiversity which will ultimately improve our understanding of coral reefs and how best to protect them."



The partnership will see the implementation of an employee participation program for BHP Billiton staff who will actively engage in the research project by attending field trips and assisting with data collection.

“We want to give our employees the opportunity to learn about coral reefs directly from the experts,” Mr Randolph said.

**ENDS**

**For further information:**

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***BHP Billiton** is the world’s largest diversified resources group with a clearly articulated commitment to sustainable development. BHP Billiton is committed to actively enhancing its contribution to biodiversity protection.*

***Great Barrier Reef Foundation** is Australia’s pre-eminent independent fundraiser for coral reef research. Established in 1999, its mission is to protect and preserve the Great Barrier Reef.*

***Australian Institute of Marine Science** is Australia’s tropical marine research agency.*