



MEDIA RELEASE

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Innovative partnership secures national grant

Researchers studying the impact of climate change on the Great Barrier Reef will expand their important work after securing additional funding from the Australian Research Council.

The University of Queensland's Centre for Marine Studies scientists commenced the world's first significant investigation into the effects of ocean acidification in 2006 following the commitment of \$1 million from *Future Reef*, a partnership between Rio Tinto Aluminium and the Great Barrier Reef Research Foundation.

This funding has now enabled researchers to secure an Australian Research Council (ARC) linkage grant of \$476,950, announced recently.

The University of Queensland's Centre for Marine Studies director Professor Ove Hoegh-Guldberg said the ARC grant will significantly expand the project's scope and significance.

"While we now have some insight into the impacts of ocean warming on coral reefs, we are only beginning to realize the potentially serious implications of increasing levels of atmospheric carbon dioxide for reef ecosystems," Prof Hoegh-Guldberg said.

Ocean acidification occurs when increasingly large quantities of carbon dioxide are absorbed into the ocean. This can have a significant effect on the physiology of reefs, fish and other marine life.

"Understanding these impacts is of great importance for reef managers if they are to respond strategically to climate change," he said.

The Great Barrier Reef Research Foundation is an independent fundraising body with a mission to preserve and protect the Great Barrier Reef. Chief Executive Officer Judy Stewart said *Future Reef* was an excellent example of how the private sector can contribute to scientific research on the Great Barrier Reef.

"Climate change poses a significant threat to the Great Barrier Reef – possibly its most significant and certainly the most immediate - and we have already witnessed some of the damage it has caused in bleaching events of recent years," Ms Stewart said.

"The work we do, establishing funding partnerships with the private sector to address major environmental threats to the Reef, is substantially enhanced by this new link to the Australian Research Council. We look forward to working with them in support of this important work on climate impacts and responses."

Future Reef not only supports the scientific study but facilitates 'expeditions' of Rio Tinto Aluminium employees to the University's Heron Island Research Station to assist researchers with data collection.

Rio Tinto Aluminium Chief Executive Oscar Groeneveld said *Future Reef* allowed the company to be actively involved in reef preservation and add to scientific knowledge about climate change.

“Employees have the experience of playing a key role in the research programme through ‘*Future Reef*’ and return to the workplace particularly strong advocates of environmentally responsible behaviour across all of our operations. That can only help our performance in the long term,” Mr Groeneveld said.

“With over 20 employees having already taken part in the initiative, we are pretty certain Rio Tinto Aluminium is developing ‘champions of the reef’ to help ensure its future.”

Mr Groeneveld also added that he is delighted Rio Tinto Aluminium’s investment has raised the profile of this important issue and enabled researchers to secure additional funding to investigate the issue comprehensively.

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