



MEDIA RELEASE

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First outer Great Barrier Reef coral nursery established

The Great Barrier Reef's first outer reef coral nursery has been established on a high-value reef off Cairns by the Reef Restoration Foundation volunteers who successfully pioneered off-shore coral nurseries in Australia at Fitzroy Island.

Reef Restoration Foundation Chief Executive Officer Rob Giason said the not-for-profit organisation had partnered with Cairns family-owned Seastar Cruises to develop the nursery near their Hastings Reef mooring, 56km off Cairns.

"World coral expert Dr Charlie Veron led the process of selecting corals from the Acroporidae and Pocilloporidae families which survived the 2016 and 2017 bleaching events to use as stock for the nursery," he said.

"A group of 25 volunteers worked over three days from December 6-7 to install 10 coral trees and attach the corals with another 20 trees to be installed at the site alongside two large coral bommies.

"These corals should take around eight months to grow to a size where they can be harvested and planted on degraded sections of the reef, just as we did at the Powershop Coral Tree Nursery at Fitzroy Island over the past two years."

Seastar Cruises owner Peter Edwards is excited about working in collaboration with Reef Restoration Foundation to improve the resilience of the Great Barrier Reef.

"Hastings Reef is stunning to visit with healthy corals and colourful marine life, but there are sections which have been damaged over the years by bleaching or cyclones that would benefit from speeding up the natural regeneration process," he said.

"Passengers on Seastar Cruises are educated about the dynamics of the Great Barrier Reef's complex ecosystem and having a coral nursery near our mooring will help them understand how reefs can evolve with the global challenges posed by climate change.

"It is also another way our tourism company and our dedicated staff can be involved in nurturing the World Heritage area that we work in."

Mr Giason said the Hastings Reef Nursery was the first of four outer Great Barrier Reef nurseries approved by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority with plans to establish the next one at Moore Reef in April, a program made possible with the support of the NAB Foundation.

"We want to work closely with tourism operators to develop a viable business model to restore and maintain high-value coral reefs that can be expanded to other sites on the Great Barrier Reef," he said.

"The Great Barrier Reef supports a \$6 billion a year tourism industry and approximately 40,000 tourism jobs, so this project aims to assist tourism operators to care for the health of the section of reef they operate in.

“The marine tourism industry relies upon a healthy and resilient reef and is urgently seeking appropriate management techniques that support the values of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, while also enabling sustainable tourism operations to occur.

“Many of the high-value sites utilised by the tourism industry are situated in Marine National Park Green Zones, which places strict protections on the activities that can be undertaken in these zones.

“Coral reef restoration is a priority initiative in the Great Barrier Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan and coral gardening activities have been undertaken internationally for more than three decades.”

Become a Coral Crusader at reefrestorationfoundation.org/pages/crusader and follow Reef Restoration Foundation on its journey at www.facebook.com/reefrestorationfoundation/ and www.instagram.com/reef_restoration_foundation.

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HIGH-RES IMAGE & VIDEO: <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/fm0i8p4fhr3h60p/AAA2lXV-1qaevr24303t1xkMa?dl=0> **Credit to Reef Restoration Foundation**

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