



**MEDIA RELEASE**

*For immediate release*

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**Great Barrier Reef gives green light to next stage of underwater art project**

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority has given official approvals for the next stage of the Underwater Tourism Infrastructure in the Whitsunday project to begin.

As part of the joint state and federally funded \$7 million Tourism Recovery Fund the project will complement the locations of where the six underwater artworks will be installed. It will include planting over 400 coral colonies in sheltered bays around the Whitsunday Islands on mid-water coral nursery frames for 6-12 months before being planted on surrounding degraded reef.

Initially, two sites at Blue Pearl and Manta Ray Bay have been selected based on baseline ecological surveys and strong support from Whitsunday stakeholders. This part of the project represents the first step towards larger-scale and longer-term reef restoration activities that will involve local divers, citizen scientists and tourists helping the Great Barrier Reef recover.

Reef Ecologic and scientists from James Cook University are co-leading the federal government sponsored National Environmental Science Programme (NESP) Project Best Practice Reef Restoration for the GBR and this project represents a great opportunity to assist in restoring local coral reefs and improve education and stewardship.

Reef Ecologic Director and Associate Professor Adam Smith believes this project is critical for the local community following the effects of Cyclone Debbie in 2017.

“This project represents an important and positive action by scientists and the local community to improve the health of our precious inshore coral reefs,” he said.

“We will work closely with the local community to share knowledge, undertake training and restore hope through active, hands-on involvement in the Whitsundays reef restoration project”, Reef Ecologic’s reef restoration scientist Nathan Cook said.

Tourism Whitsundays Chief Executive Officer Tash Wheeler welcomed the approval of the permit. “The Whitsundays region has some amazing natural attractions and facilities including the Ngaro Sea Trail, Whitehaven Beach and now visitors can make a real difference by work with scientists on coral reef nurseries and explore unique underwater art and education,” she said.

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