

Commercial fishermen agree to protect Coral Sea reefs



Scuba divers and tourist boat operators will benefit from the decision by Coral Sea fishermen to stop commercially fishing selected reefs. Allison Craig

The Coral Sea Fishers Association (CSFA), one of Australia's largest commercial fishing groups, has volunteered not to fish some of the country's most lucrative reefs.

An agreement between tourist dive-boat operators and the CSFA means trawlers will no longer take fish from Bougainville, Osprey, Flora Dart and Herald's Surprise reefs, apart from small-scale fishing to replenish stocks for public aquariums.

The near-pristine reefs, which lie in the Coral Sea outside the Great Barrier Reef, attract divers from around the world.

Commercial operators will be banned from fishing within 2 km, effectively leaving the reefs to recreational fishing and dive-boat operators.

'The Coral Sea fishery covers an area of 92 000

square kilometres and while commercial fishing is already intensively managed, we recognise that the reefs in the Coral Sea closest to Cairns are of particular importance to dive chart operators,' says CSFA member Rob Lowden.

'This shows that the people who make a living from the reefs care about them greatly,' he said.

Lowden said he believed the agreement was the first time commercial operators had voluntarily surrendered fishing rights anywhere in the world.

Shark researcher and cinematographer Richard Fitzpatrick said the agreement protected large fish species and was a boon for tourism.

'The move to maintain the ecological balance of these reefs is a fantastic effort by both parties.'

Millions allocated to Micronesia to meet climate change challenge

As part of a US\$100 million commitment to island conservation and reducing the impact of climate change, the Global Environment Facility (GEF) has committed US\$6 million to the Micronesia Challenge, a landmark conservation initiative in the Northern Pacific to effectively conserve 30 per cent of marine resources and 20 per cent of terrestrial resources by 2020.

The allocation matches US\$6 million already pledged by The Nature Conservancy and Conservation International to the Micronesia Challenge.

The announcement was made during a Pacific Island Conference of Leaders in Washington, DC, where Pacific nations leaders highlighted the importance of the Micronesia Challenge in ensuring sustainable development and the preservation of traditional cultures.

The Micronesia Challenge is a collaborative conservation effort between Palau, the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI), the Federated States of

Micronesia (FSM), and two US jurisdictions, the Territory of Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

It encompasses more than 6.7 million square kilometres of ocean and will help protect at least 66 threatened species, 4 per cent of the global total reef area and 58 per cent of all known coral species.

Micronesian waters are home to the world's largest tuna fishery and more than 1300 species of reef fish, which are important island food sources.

As the financial mechanism for four international environmental conventions, the GEF helps fund initiatives that assist developing countries in meeting the objectives of the conventions. It encompasses developing and developed countries, as well as those with economies in transition.

Non-governmental organisations participate in GEF activities and assist in the design, execution and monitoring of projects.



The Micronesia Challenge should help reduce the impact of climate change on places like Tumon Bay, Guam. rboncato