

Fears for Great Barrier Reef's future

From Page 1

Moderate to very high bleaching was seen inshore and offshore from Cape Flattery to Mackay.

Dr Marshall said underwater surveys found that few reefs escaped bleaching, but that it appeared most reefs would recover with only minor death of corals.

"However, we did find that some of the most severely bleached reefs were devastated with 50 to 90

per cent of coral dead at some sites," he said.

"Australia has been lucky to see another major bleaching event without widespread death of corals but the devastation we have seen at some sites provides a vivid warning of what could happen if hot water events become more frequent and severe."

Given climate models showed the potential for maximum temperatures to increase by 6C in the

next few decades, the fear was that coral bleaching would become more frequent and more severe. "We may be witnessing the beginning of a slow-motion degradation of the reef system that will only get worse in coming decades," said Dr Terry Done, from AIMS and CRC Reef.

While reef agencies and scientists could not control the weather, they would continue to keep watch on the reef, he said.