

Run-off playing havoc with barrier reef coral

By OLIVIA KATTER

LOSS of biodiversity along the Great Barrier Reef has been attributed to turbid water and land run-off among in-shore coral groups.

Australian Institute of Marine Science Research Scientist Dr Katharina Fabricius said the turbidity played a major role in the loss of soft corals and sea fans, otherwise known as octocorals.

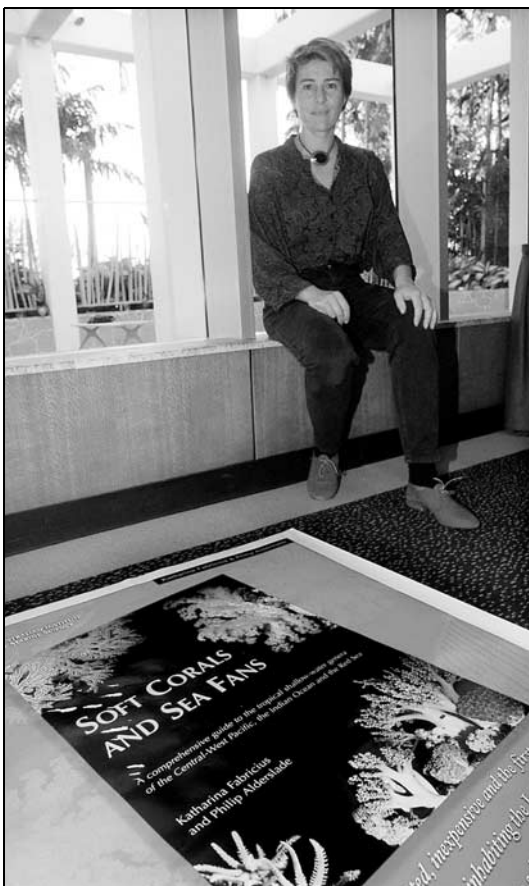
The announcement was made at the joint conference of the Australian Marine Science Association and New Zealand Marine Science Society, in Townsville last week.

Dr Fabricius said the research, conducted over three years, suggested "turbidity-tolerant corals may be replacing the less tolerant corals".

The research was based on reef surveys assessing 361 sites on 161 reefs along the Great Barrier Reef.

Most soft corals contain symbiotic algae in their tissue which depend on light to convert carbon dioxide into sugars and thus supply the soft corals with energy.

The land run-off and turbidity is responsible for this decrease in the amount of light reaching the octocorals.



INFORMATIVE ... Dr Katharina Fabricius with a poster on herbook on corals and sea fans

Photo: STEWART McLEAN SM015A23

According to Dr Fabricius, the land run-off problems are occurring mainly north of Townsville, where the problem has been linked to the effluent from banana and sugarcane plantations.

Dr Fabricius said this turbidity was also predominant around

coastal regions near Gladstone, Rockhampton and the Whitsundays.

The presentation of this research coincides with the release of Dr Fabricius's book *Soft Corals and Sea Fans*, the first field guide to fully cover the subject of this particular marine life.