

Cooler water may fail to save corals

By **OLIVIA KATTER**

THE widespread cooling of seawater along the Great Barrier Reef in March may not have come soon enough to save some species from coral bleaching.

An unprecedented number of coral reefs, including those around Magnetic Island, were seriously affected by bleaching last summer, but it is yet to be determined whether the damage will be greater than that of 1998, the worst case of coral bleaching in the history of the Great Barrier Reef.

Dr Paul Marshall from Reef HQ said research, conducted in conjunction with the Australian Institute of Marine Science, had revealed that more reefs had been affected than in 1998.

"There are more reefs affected but we won't know for sure whether it's worse or not until we get the results from these surveys," he said.

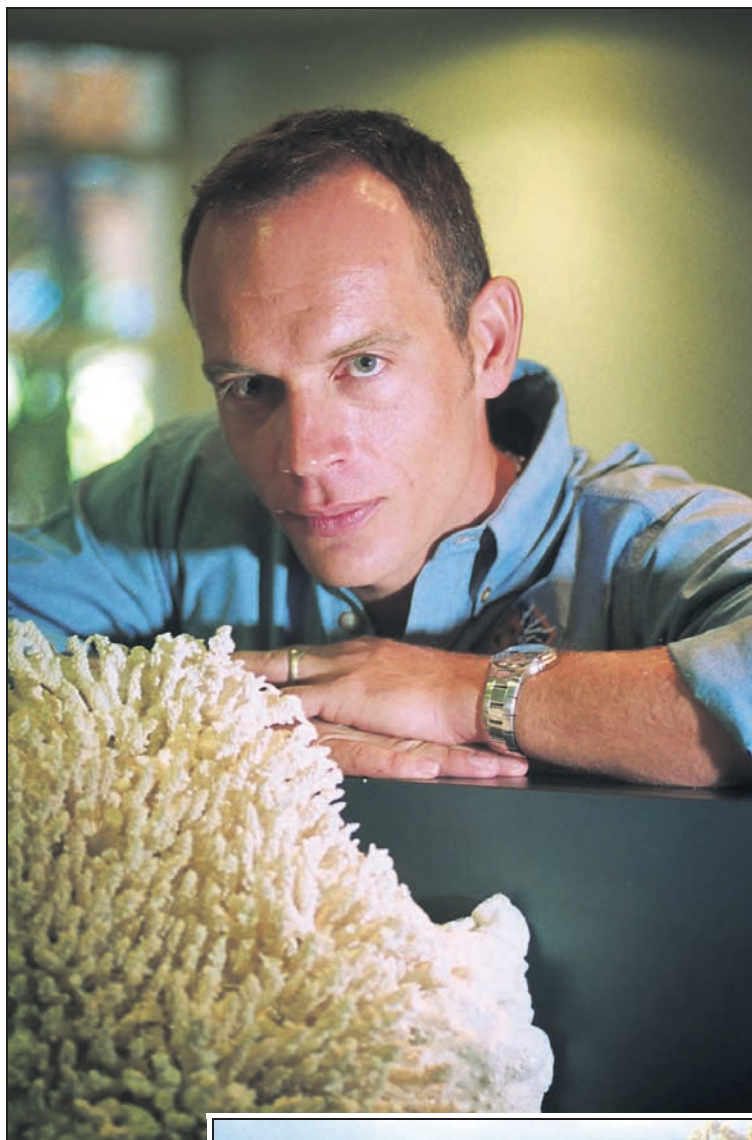
Bleaching occurs when corals become stressed and expel microscopic plants which colour their tissue and help provide them with fuel through photosynthetic activity, without the algae the coral turns white.

Unusually warm water conditions could cause stress to corals, and have contributed to coral bleaching events in the past.

During the past few weeks the two research institutes have banded together to do in-water surveys to find out the significance of the recent coral bleaching on the reef.

"The initial impression is that this bleaching we've seen has probably affected more reefs than we saw in 1998 but it's quite a different pattern," Dr Marshall said.

"This year we've seen more reefs offshore that have been affected by coral bleaching, but once again it's the in-shore reefs that have been most seriously affected."



CONCERN
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Dr Paul
Marshall at
Reef HQ.
INSET: Dr
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assesses
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bleaching
on Thetford
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