

Long-term Crown of Thorns strategy proposed

By **BETTINA GIARDINA**

AN environment protection group has called for a long-term strategy to control Crown of Thorns starfish on the Great Barrier Reef.

WWF Australia's Great Barrier Reef campaign manager Imogen Zethoven says Crown of Thorns starfish are in plague proportions

and having a devastating impact on reef ecosystems.

Unless contained, the Crown of Thorns outbreak had the potential to impact on Queensland's \$2 billion marine tourism industry which directly employed more than 25,000 people, she said.

According to CRC Reef Research Centre, a survey between

Townsville and Cairns in 1998-99 showed numbers were "very high".

The research revealed that during 1999-2000, large numbers of juvenile starfish were found on the reefs off Townsville and the starfish were larger than those found in previous surveys — indicating that the juveniles were

growing into adults. Ms Zethoven said the organisation was pleased State and Federal governments and the major political parties had started to take the issue seriously.

"However, longer term strategies are needed," she said.

The Federal Government has pledged \$700,000 in assistance over

two years to help control the Crown of Thorns starfish.

The assistance package will supplement around \$13 million in funding provided by governments since 1985 for Crown of Thorns research.

And in a down payment on Labor federal election policies, the party announced \$2 million towards the control of the starfish.