

Breakthrough in coral research

By **OLIVIA KATTER**

TEMPERATURE surveys on the reef around Magnetic Island could open the door to a new method of researching coral bleaching.

Stephen Neale from the Australian Institute of Marine Science said information from the Sea Temperature Datalogger Project he ran showed the abnormal occurrence of cool water swells on the inshore reefs appeared to prevent certain areas from bleaching.

"This opens another door to the whole bleaching question," he said.

Mr Neale has been monitoring the water temperatures around Nelly, Geoffrey and Florence bays with dataloggers, which record water temperatures on a database every 30 minutes.

He said in early January Nelly and Geoffrey bays' water temperatures were consistently high as was the amount of coral bleaching in those areas.

However, at Florence Bay the temperatures fluctuated, sometimes from 32C to 26C in a matter of hours, and there was low to non-existent coral bleaching, he said.

Mr Neale said although cool waters were a common occurrence at Myrmidon and Kelso Reefs it was uncommon for such cool temperatures to sweep through the inshore reefs.

Mr Neale said the cooler currents normally swept in from the ocean, 50 to 60km from Florence Bay.



WATER WORKS ... Stephen Neale tests water temperature in research to find the cause of coral bleaching *Photo: FIONA HARDING FH435A21*