



Benthic Habitat Survey Report

Impacted Coral Could be Successfully Translocated From Pier Site

Grand Cayman, Cayman Islands (22 September, 2015) The Benthic Habitat Survey Report commissioned on behalf of the Cayman Islands Government to examine marine habitats within the proposed cruise piers dredging footprint estimates that a significant proportion of the impacted coral could be successfully translocated.

Marine Environmental Consultants CSA Ocean Sciences Inc (CSA) which undertook the seabed survey found that within the 32.5 acre (131,523 m²) area of impact, the coral-supporting habitats amounted to a total of 11.2 acres (45,350 m²) and comprised of approximately 4.3 acres (17,560 m²) of hard bottom with sand veneer habitat and 6.9 acres (27,790 m²) of exposed reef formation habitat.

Based on the Consultants calculations, 391,001 hard corals and 61,291 soft corals were estimated to be at risk from the dredging and land reclamation activities. Of these, the report states that more than 116,800 hard corals and over 17,000 soft corals could be successfully translocated. The remaining corals were deemed to be relatively young specimens and unsuitable for translocation due to their small size.

Tourism Minister Moses Kirkconnell stated that the Ministry commissioned the report to get a clearer understanding of the composition of the seabed within the dredging footprint. "The Ministry takes seriously the environmental concerns associated to the proposed development of the piers and commissioned the Benthic Habitat survey to look more closely at the area to eliminate any data or analysis gaps. This survey is both necessary and timely, particularly in light of the differing views and opinions about precisely what exists within the area of impact and

how it could potentially be affected if the project proceeded?”

Minister Kirkconnell further explained that while the EIA conducted by Baird stands as is, this supplemental report is like looking at the area through a magnifying glass. “This is the largest project ever being considered for our Islands and government has a responsibility and duty of care to ensure that our collective decision is based on sound scientific evidence, not speculation or impassioned pleas, however well intended those might be. When Cabinet convenes to make its decision on the cruise piers it must be able to do so with full confidence that all of the relevant facts and information have been sourced and objectively presented for consideration. Additionally, proposed mitigation solutions will also have to satisfactorily demonstrate the likelihood of successful outcome, again based on objective data and evidence.”

In the Benthic Survey Report ‘In-kind’ and ‘out-of-kind’ mitigation options are proposed as possible solutions to address impacted coral. In simple terms, in-kind mitigation is the creation of a habitat type similar to that which is impacted by an activity, whereas out-of-kind mitigation is the creation of a habitat that is different to the original environment. The report states that mitigation options which include coral translocation and the establishment of coral nurseries were considered by CSA to be suitable for the George Town Harbour Berthing Project. “Coral translocation, if done properly, can significantly reduce the loss of coral tissue and the ecological services provided by corals,” the report states.

CSA began doing coral reattachment during the infancy of this technique and have been instrumental in refining reattachment procedures. Their opinion is based on their extensive experience in coral reattachment and field-tested applications for reattaching coral, soft coral, and large structural sponges as a means of accelerating habitat recovery.

The survey notes that the Company has conducted coral reattachment on more than 60 programs worldwide, some of which were monitored by the U.S. National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), National Coral Reef Institute (NCRI), and Florida Marine Research Institute, to determine the relative success of the coral reattachment technique.

In one example in the Florida Keys, an independent third party reported 100% survivorship and coral colony stability 2 years following the restoration. Another example cites 1,000 coral colonies which were temporarily cached due to construction and reattached to a submerged structure. According to the National Coral Reef Institute, monitoring of the coral stability and health at the reattachment site over a 3-year period showed a 97% success rate.

Commenting on the time government has invested in data gathering, Councillor for Tourism Joey Hew stated “Those for and against the project are understandably keen to know what Governments ultimate decision will be and therefore the time taken to source expert advice and scientific data is proving to be a cause of frustration to some. However, I believe that the majority of our people prefer that this important and necessary process is carried out thoroughly and are supportive of the steps being taken, particularly as all of this intellectual property belongs to the Country.”

The Benthic Habit Survey Report is currently being assessed by Government officials in the Ministry of Tourism and the Department of Environment and is being posted to the Ministry’s website for public review.

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