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Preface: Proceedings of the National Coral Reef Institute's International Conference on Scientific Aspects of Coral Reef Assessment, Monitoring and Restoration

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PREFACE

It is increasingly clear that the coral reefs of the world are undergoing large-scale changes, the causes of which continue to be the subject of much debate and speculation. Having recently returned from the 9th International Coral Reef Symposium held in Bali, Indonesia, I found this message becoming ever more strident. The scientific evidence to interpret these changes is still evolving and seeking definition in the scientific community and literature. In April 1999, the National Coral Reef Institute convened a meeting of international scientists and resource managers to address scientific aspects of assessment, monitoring, and restoration in coral reefs systems worldwide. These proceedings represent the combined efforts of the scientific research and management community to address these urgent issues.

The Call for Papers asked presenters and potential authors to incorporate a number of issues in their presentations and papers including:

1. What do you as a researcher/manager perceive to be important needs and trends in these areas over the next five years?
2. What are the emerging issues and priorities for coral reef research, conservation, and management?
3. What are the inadequacies in current programs/activities and what action(s), modifications, or new approaches are needed to rectify these shortcomings?

To a large extent the articles reflect these requests and represent a consensus of what is happening in the area of coral reef research and management, and what the global community of scientists and managers feel needs to be done in response. A total of 51 manuscripts were eventually accepted for publication representing the following topics:

- Assessment (13 papers)
- Biodiversity and community dynamics (5)
- Impacts and stressors (5)
- Monitoring (15)
- Restoration dynamics (13)

It was clear during the conference that despite much discussion about identifying and protecting ‘marine biodiversity’ in coral reef ecosystems, the majority of efforts are still directed toward corals and fish (flagship species), a small portion of a reef’s total complement of biodiversity. Marine reserves originated as fishery management tools whose purpose was to enhance fisheries and ‘protect associated biodiversity.’ The ‘associated biodiversity’ component has been variously categorized but remains unresolved and undefined.

Another popular comparison is made frequently between rainforests and reefs. However, as evident in the conference talks, presentations and posters, coral reef scientists have yet to fully engage this topic at the level our rainforest colleagues have achieved. In tropical rainforests insects, in addition to their overwhelming abundance and ecological importance, have proven highly informative about the intricate workings of wet terrestrial rainforest systems, especially in canopy habitats. Fish and corals are to reefs what trees and birds are to the rainforest. There is a growing consensus among scientists that we must identify and investigate the ‘insect equivalents’ on reefs. There is every reason to believe research in this area will provide a finer focus and detail regarding the intricate and complex workings of coral reef ecosystems as they have done in tropical rainforests.

A foldout included in these proceedings provides a detailed comparison of all monitoring and assessment programs currently used in coral reefs. Arranged by technique, 18 monitoring programs are compared with each other among 12 categories.

Publication of these proceedings was made possible through the generous financial support of the National Center for Caribbean Coral Reef Research at the Rosenstiel School of Marine and Atmospheric Science, University of Miami. I would also like to acknowledge the efforts of numerous reviewers whose efforts enabled us to achieve a high scientific standard in these proceedings. Finally, I would like to personally thank Carol Fretwell whose patience and diligence in dealing with me, and a multitude of authors and reviewers, kept this project on course and allowed its completion in a timely manner.

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