



MEDIA RELEASE

MAGNT's Dr Barry Russell to Attend Workshop in Hong Kong

A leading Territory scientist will fly to Hong Kong tomorrow to attend an International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Species Assessment workshop.

Dr Barry Russell, Assistant Director, Research and Collections, at the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, said the week-long workshop would focus on fish species that are commercially exploited, with assessments made to determine whether these species are threatened or endangered.

"The workshop will assess the 160 known species of groupers world wide that are commercially targeted and used in the live fish trade," Dr Russell said.

"The IUCN workshop will determine which groupers are under threat from commercial fish operations, how these fish should be categorised and what measures implemented to best conserve the species.

"I have put together assessments for 13 grouper species from Northern Australia, with information to be added and reviewed at the workshop.

"Groupers are all top predators and therefore key species in the marine food chain and they also have what is called protogynous sex reversal, meaning the larger fish, which are attractive to commercial fishermen, are more likely to be male than female.

"Many groupers also aggregate to spawn and these spawning aggregations are targeted by fishermen, putting the species further at threat."

He said commercial exploitation, particularly harvesting for the live fish trade, is the main threat of fish species in South-East Asia, and as the hub of the live fish trade, Hong Kong is an ideal location for such a workshop.

Dr Russell is a fish taxonomist, with taxonomy being the science focusing on the classification of living things.

"The taxonomy of a lot of species is poorly known, so this is an opportunity to not only look at issues of conservation but also problems of identification," Dr Russell said.

"Many of the groupers under threat in South-East Asia are also found in Australia's northern waters and while the local pressures are not so great here, it is important to measure impacts in a regional context to prevent possible demise of the species.

"It is exciting to be attending the workshop, as there will be leading scientists from the United States, South Africa, France, Brazil, Australia and some South-East Asian nations.

"The workshop is an excellent opportunity to form and enhance scientific networks and this can only be good news for the conservation of threatened or endangered fish species around the world."

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Media Note – For more information contact Dr Barry Russell on 8999 8245

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