

MADURAI

Centre for monitoring coral reefs comes up at Mandapam

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Plan to set up hatchery for marine stock enhancement through sea ranching

RAMANATHAPURAM

The National Centre for Coastal Research (NCCR), which is studying corals across the country, has established its Field Research Centre (FRC) at Mandapam near Rameswaram for monitoring and mapping of coral reefs in the Gulf of Mannar, comprising 21 islands.

The Chennai-based NCCR, under the Ministry of Earth Sciences, is coming back to the Gulf of Mannar after a gap of nearly 13 years to set up the centre to study the health of coral reefs in the region. It had conducted mapping of coral reefs in 2000 and 2005.

“We are coming back after a gap of 13 years to conduct a study on the health of coral reefs and the government has allotted 25 acres near Pamban road bridge for setting up the research centre,” T.

Shanmugaraj, Project Coordinator, told *The Hindu*. The centre would be established at a cost of ₹ 1.46 crore under the guidance of M.V. Ramanamurthy, Director, NCCR, he said.

He said information on coral distribution in three islands in the Mandapam group was collected after a field survey conducted during January, 2000, using DGPS, scuba diving and skin diving. “We proposed to take up comparative studies from 2000 till date for predicting changes of reef health status and take up restoration of coral reefs in degraded areas,” he said.

The NCCR had entered into a memorandum of agreement with Gulf of Mannar Marine National Park for capacity building, he said, adding

pending civil works, the NCCR had started functioning from a rented building and begun its survey. The research scientists had already completed surveying here, Manoli and Manoliputti islands and found 50% to 70% live corals.

“There is no coral bleaching but there is lot of sediment formation,” he said, adding they proposed to complete surveying all the islands, spread up to Thoothukudi, before launching the restoration work. Once the FRC was established in two years, the NCCR would set up a hatchery for marine stock enhancement through sea ranching and a separate hatchery to produce hatchlings of ornamental fishes to provide alternative livelihood to the fishing community in the region, he said. Setting up an Aqua Tech Park for the benefit of local people and developing technology for breeding of endangered marine species were also on the cards, he said.