

## Coral Reefs of the Red Sea in good conditions

### ( Interim report from an expedition to the Red Sea reefs )

While a group of marine scientists from the Kiel Leibniz Institute of Marine Sciences (IFM-GEOMAR) and Faculty of Marine Sciences in KAU is currently surveying the Red Sea on the German research vessel POSEIDON, a second working group led by the Kiel marine biologist Professor Martin Wahl has been doing coastal work since the beginning of February. Their studies are focussed on the coral reefs to be found in this fascinating marginal sea environment. A team of eight scientists, four from Kiel and four from Saudi Arabia, has taken a look at 11 reefs so far in the area between the port of Yanbu' al-Bahr and the border to Yemen. The scientists performed numerous SCUBA dives to perform a general evaluation of reef quality and detailed physiological and chemical analyses of the ecology of the coral species *Pocillopora verrucosa*. In addition, they took cores from colonies of the species *Porites lutea*. The cores will be used as historical archives, providing information on the nutrient status of the Red Sea. In addition, plankton and water quality were assessed. Four of the reefs studied showed damage which is clearly due to anthropogenic impact. The other seven sites, however, were found in a largely natural condition. "We will have to wait for the results of our detailed lab analyses", Professor Wahl resumes after the first

weeks of the expedition. "Yet, we have the impression that most of the reefs are in a good condition". Until the end of February, the group will be examining some more reefs located further north near the border to Jordan. Prof. Wahl and his team are expected back in Kiel at the beginning of March.

The ongoing studies on the near-coastal coral reefs of the Red Sea as well as the current expedition of R/V POSEIDON are part of the Jeddah Transect Project, which is a cooperation of IFM-GEOMAR and the King Abdulaziz University (KAU) in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Kiel and KAU scientists are going to undertake numerous marine and coastal expeditions in order to gain knowledge on coastal protection, the ecology of life communities of corals and fish stocks, release of gases and fluids at submarine slopes and insights on deep sea basin in the centre of the Red Sea. "So far, the collaboration is working very well", Prof. Wahl says. He is planning to conduct at least three further coastal expeditions within the next years.

