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A comparison of the population ecology
of reef flat corals
of the family
Faviidae (Goniastrea, Platygyra).

Thesis submitted by
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in May 1986

for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in
the Department of Marine Biology at
James Cook University of North Queensland

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R. C. Babcock

26 May 1986

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ABSTRACT

The spatial distribution, abundance and growth rates of Goniastrea aspera, G. favulus and Platygyra sinensis were studied at two fringing reefs in the central Great Barrier Reef region. All three species exhibited similar degrees of spatial aggregation, despite the reproductive behaviour of G. favulus which was the only one of the species to spawn eggs with benthic development. Growth rates and recruitment rates in G. aspera and G. favulus were positively related to abundances at the two sites. Growth rates of both adults and juveniles were also used to estimate colony ages.

Gametogenic cycles and size specific fecundities were determined for each species at both sites. Goniastrea aspera, G. favulus and P. sinensis were among a large number of species studied which were observed to participate in annual mass spawning events. These mass spawnings are predictable and take place on only a few nights a year, after full moons in October and November. Studies of development subsequent to spawning showed that larvae did not become mobile for at least 36 hours, and the first larvae were capable of settling only after 4 to 5 days. Frequency distributions and rates of mortality based on both size and age were studied in marked quadrats at the two sites.

Frequency distributions based on size differed in some respects from those based on age, particularly with respect to the older age classes which decreased in mean size in many populations. Mortality patterns showed greater similarities between the two methods, however differences were again apparent in the older/larger classes since partial mortality to individuals is not accounted for in age based measurements. Finally, life tables were generated for each species. The life history patterns of G. aspera, G. favulus and P. sinensis appear to demonstrate a number of trade-offs that can be made between traits such as egg size, egg number, larval mortality, age at first reproduction, and mean colony age and generation times.