



Egmont atoll northern seaward reef in March 2006

### ***Setbacks to coral recovery in Egmont atoll***

This is a photograph of Egmont's northern seaward reef in March 2006 at 8–15 metres deep. Almost all these table corals are newly dead, though a few living segments can be seen (the greenish-brown patches in the distance on the right, and left of centre above the inset, contrasting against the brownish grey of the dead coral). Most of these corals have been killed recently.

In many parts of Chagos this table coral, *Acropora cytherea*, has showed remarkable recovery after the mass mortality of 1998. It clearly recovered here too and these tables were 4 or 5 years old when they again died over many hectares.

The inset chart shows sea temperature of Chagos, from 1871 to 2006<sup>1</sup>. Every bar is one year. Years are not arranged in order, but are ranked from coolest to warmest. They are colour coded in blocks of 30 years (except the last block of 1990 to present). The temperatures are measured against the average of 1960–1989 (an accepted reference benchmark), and the spread of colours shows how most of the warmest years occurred most recently, during the last decade in fact. In Egmont, sea warming was probably magnified further in this atoll's large, shallow lagoon, where heated water developed. This probably pulsed out over this seaward reef at some stage.

With rising temperatures many more setbacks to recovery can be expected.

<sup>1</sup> Using 9 cells of HadISST1 monthly SST data covering Chagos.