



HOMING IN . . . JCU researcher Dr Christopher Bunt with his trout tracking equipment

Spawning trout can't escape scientific glare

By **OLIVIA KATTER**

NOTHING was sacred for the spawning coral trout monitored by a James Cook University research fellow in the world's first telemetry study of the species.

Telemetry is the remote monitoring of movement, which is what Dr Christopher Bunt did for four months from the One Tree Island research station off the coast of Gladstone.

Dr Bunt implanted depth-sensitive transmitters on the trout and monitored the hundreds of megabytes of data sent back to him via an array of sonobuoys.

"The telemetry allowed me to pinpoint their positions and track their habitat in the coral," he said.

Dr Bunt said the study results would aid in the development of a management plan to protect coral trout spawning aggregation areas from overexploitation.

He said the major problem for the commercially popular coral trout was that anglers were identifying the spawning aggregation areas and fishing there.

"This causes population crashes in that habitat," he said.

Previously, coral trout activity had only been monitored by a tagging system in which reef authorities attached a small plastic tag to the trout. It required those who caught the fish to notify the relevant authority or research station.

Dr Bunt said it was more advantageous to use the telemetry system as it allowed for three-dimensional tracking of the fish within the complex environment they inhabited.