JCU reef, rainforest displays to promote STEM interest

Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation will run education programs in the building to promote the sciences to high school students. It is hoped that will help turn around Australia’s poor record in producing science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) graduates.

"With the help of the CSIRO, we are hoping to engage a lot of schoolchildren in the sciences and engineering," Mr Kavanagh said.

"By having these interesting features in the building we are hoping that will create positive memories among the students. We want them to have strong memories of the day and build an interest in the sciences."

Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull announced a $1.1 billion National Innovation and Science Agenda last year, partly aimed at encouraging the study of STEM subjects in high schools and universities.

Australia produces only 18 per cent of graduates in STEM fields compared with twice that rate in Asia and China.

The Science Place will be one of the university’s most imposing buildings of up to five levels and measuring longer than a football field.

Mr Kavanagh said it would provide about 12,000sq m of floor space. A ground floor level, three-outlet food court would seat 125 people.

On the first floor, two "super labs", each able to hold up to 144 students, would provide teaching space for subjects including chemistry, biology and biochemistry, while it would also house a 360-seat lecture theatre.

Two floors would house research labs, while the top floor would accommodate plant and equipment and building support services.

Mr Kavanagh said the project was on track to accept staff in early February and its first students on February 20.