



PO Box 404 ● Townsville QLD 4810 ● Ph: +61 (0)7 4724 3950 ● www.reefcheckaustralia.org

Reef Check Australia News Update February 2007

Reef Check Australia involves the community in collecting data on the health of the Reef.



“Long-term monitoring goes a long way to helping us understand and observe the marine ecosystem... Involving the community in reef monitoring is important, especially given the increasing pressures on the reef from coral bleaching and declining water quality... I applaud Reef Check for helping monitor and protect this natural asset,” Senator Ian Campbell, Minister for the Environment and Heritage, Nov 2006.

Welcome to the start of the 2007 Reef Check survey season. After the last challenging but interesting year, we are all looking forward to a year of growth and expansion. All in all, 2006 was very successful, so a great round of thanks to everybody whose individual efforts combined to make it happen again!

New Premises!

Our first news is the change of location for Reef Check Australia! We can now be found at Suite 5, Citilink building, 358 – 360 Flinders Street Mall (on the ground floor, downstairs from the Reef and Rainforest Research Centre and IMPAC). We are proud to announce that our rent is being subsidised by Townsville City Council.



PO Box 404 ● Townsville QLD 4810 ● Ph: +61 (0)7 4724 3950 ● www.reefcheckaustralia.org

Banner image © Quiksilver International

The People inside Reef Check

Staff: Jos Hill (Managing Director), Roger Beeden (Marketing and Communications Manager) and Adrian Turnbull (Project Coordinator).

Volunteer Intern Placements: Anne-Laure Clement has been doing a great job to date preparing our huge digital photographic and video library for the online database. Anne-Laure will be joining our survey team during 2007 along with Lauren Bird who is assisting us with our outreach and communications and David Roadknight who is assisting with the coordination of our survey projects; and we welcome back Zoë Andrews from Wales (who helped us during the 2006 survey season).

New Reef Check Surveyors!



Townsville: Top, from left: Dave Henry, Karen Brady, Lauren Bird, Ron Schroeder, Laura Fantozzi, Claudio Fiorentini, Jon Shaw, Laura Smith. Bottom, from left: David Roadknight, David Buchler.

We are also pleased to announce that our team of volunteer surveyors is growing fast, with ongoing courses in both Townsville and Cairns, looking to add a further 16 trained Reef Checkers to our ranks.

While poor weather has hampered the practical aspects of the Townsville course (thanks again for your patience), we look forward to getting back in the water very soon to produce 10 more Reef Check graduates from Townsville!

We have just taught our first course in Cairns as we are



Cairns: Top, from left: Jos Hill, John Burnett, Karen Mudd, Rob Agar; bottom, from left: Chris Jones, Iris Bom, Midaviau, Yumiko Asari

building a new RCA team based in the north. This will broaden our operations as part of our campaign to spread the word of RCA across Australia...

The Great Barrier Reef Project

In December 2006 RCA was awarded a \$5000 Canon Australia Environmental Grant. This enabled us to buy 3 new digital cameras with underwater housings that will be used for the 2007 survey season and a projector, which has already been used for RCA presentations and trainings.

Find out more at http://www.canon.com.au/home/story_1604.html. **Canon**

We have been busy conducting updates for all volunteers. These were successful and attendees are now keen to get into the water and complete some surveys! This year as well as the evening review sessions we ran review dives to cover substrate identification and give volunteers a chance to practice with the new underwater cameras.

Following site selection in Cairns, we have updated our data sheets to include reef habitat descriptions including lagoon, back reef, reef flat, reef crest and reef slope. In response to difficulties classifying turf algae containing sediment, we have introduced a new silt definition to give an overall estimate of silt at the survey site. This will take effect in the 2007 survey season.

Reef Check Townsville

Fishing line clean up from Orpheus and Pelorus Islands protected zones

In response to suggestions from the local community that poaching has been occurring within protected marine zones, we will conduct a census of fishing line as well as clean it up from around Orpheus and Pelorus islands. This project is in collaboration with James Cook University Researchers Garry Russ, Dave Williamson and Rich Evans, GBRMPA and PADI Project Aware.

Once cleared, a baseline can be established so Reef Check Australia and researchers from JCU can then start monitoring fish size and abundance as well as incidence of finding new fishing debris, which may be an indication of 'poaching' within new GBRMPA zones. This is the first time for a project of this kind in the GBRMP.

The information gathered will be passed on to GBRMPA, QP&WS and other bodies to review and perhaps make changes to their marine management practices and improve the quality of community education regarding marine protected zones so as to ensure appropriate use of shared marine resources.

Reef Check Results

After much anticipation, we are proud to announce we have received delivery of the first version of our online spatial database – a huge thank you to Stuart Kininmonth. Our interns have started the initial rounds of data entry (which will take a while, as there's six years of past research to work through!), and we look forward to a public access release later this year. Tasks will include a review of the database itself, and developing online reports, but we are looking for a volunteer with knowledge of Coldfusion who can help us set up our reporting system for this database. If anyone is able to help, financial sponsorship to assist with this step would be warmly welcomed.

New EcoAction Program

In 2006, Reef Check pioneered a new method of providing incentives for the private sector to become more heavily involved in leading and supporting existing and new monitoring teams in the coral reef regions. Developed through a collaborative effort between Reef Check Headquarters, Australia, Dominican Republic and Indonesia, the new EcoAction program involves a formal Reef Check testing and certification program with multiple levels to appeal to tourists and experienced divers of all ages. Cross certification is available with PADI, NAUI and SDI.

The EcoAction Program consists of 4 levels, the first two, Reef Check Adventures children's book and the Underwater Guide will be rolled out by RCA this year. 2 new trainings, Discover Reef Check and the Ecodiver course, will be rolled out next year. The Ecodiver course is a new international standard for Reef Check training.

This marine conservation education program is sold to tourists by dive shops and resorts in order to raise funds to pay for monitoring (boats, equipment, gasoline etc). The new Reef Check EcoAction Program has been launched in a number of countries in the Caribbean and Indo Pacific and has been well-received with high demand from scuba divemasters and instructors to be certified. The built in incentive is that RC certified instructors and divemasters can then sell the training course and make some profit while at the same time raising funds for their local RC teams.

Shane Penny & Leo Dutra practice Reef Check fish surveys



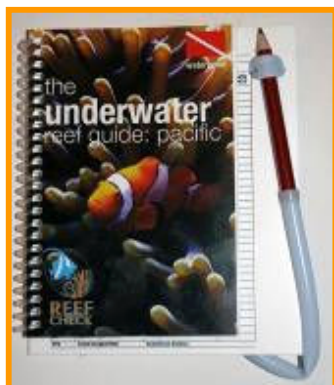
Reef Check Australia was involved in training the first coordinators in Cozumel, Mexico. Reef Check Australia ran the first in-country EcoAction training in January 2007. Participants included Shane Penny from the Department of Natural Resources, Environment & the Arts Arafura Timor Research Facility in Darwin. Shane will collaborate with Leo Dutra from University of New England, Armidale and Yara Tibirica from James Cook University to establish a Reef Check project in East Timor. Other EcoAction instructor trainees included David Roadknight, Zoë Andrews, Claudio Fiorentini, Anne-Laure Clement, Roger Beeden and Adrian Turnbull.

[Reef Check Adventures](#) for little nippers!

Reef Check Adventures is the first 'step' of the EcoAction program. In this exciting and challenging activity book, Reef Check brings to children aged 7-12 the dazzling and diverse world of coral reefs. With over 40 pages of engaging activities and fun coral reef facts, children will discover the mysterious and magical undersea world of colour and light. Young readers will also be exposed to the importance of conservation and what they can do to ensure the survival of these ecological wonders. This book promises hours of fun and enjoyment with educational lessons to last a lifetime!



Get interactive with [The Underwater Reef Guide](#): indo-pacific!



The Underwater Reef Guide will enhance anyone's diving and snorkelling experience. It can be used by anybody with a desire to increase their knowledge and understanding of the fascinating coral reef fish, invertebrates, corals and algae that comprise the Indo-Pacific coral reef ecosystem. Developed by Reef Check scientists, the waterproof Reef Guide contains photographs and information on 50 organisms specifically chosen for their regional abundance as well as their important role in the ecosystem allowing you to identify them. The attached reusable slate allows the user to record what they see and by submitting their data online they will be assisting the Reef Check scientists in tracking global coral reef health and contributing to our global coral reef status reports.

Volunteers can obtain Reef Check Adventures and the Underwater Reef Guide by contacting RCA directly.

Training

The next RCA training course being conducted is Fish Survey methodology – a great chance to brush up on your fish identification skills and learn something about fish habitat and general behaviours. This short course costs \$245, and will run in block mode in March/April.

The next RCA main training course in Substrate Survey methodology will be held part time in September 2007. Exact dates will be out soon.

Download training course details from www.reefcheckaustralia.org/training.



Volunteer opportunities

If you want to get involved with our surveys please contact support@reefcheckaustralia.org or go to www.reefcheckaustralia.org/training for a training program outline.

We have full-time volunteer placements each year for budding marine biologists who want to get work experience with us. We are also looking for office support in the following areas:

- Grant writer: as much time as you can spare 😊
- Corporate fundraising

Sponsorship Opportunities

We are looking for investment in the following projects. As an environmental charity we are a tax deductible gift recipient. For all of these opportunities we offer brand exposure for our sponsors on products produced, through our community events/presentations, and on our website.

EcoAction Program: We have been collaborating with Reef Check Headquarters in the development of some new ecotourism products which we will sell via our tourism partners to increase tourist understanding of coral reefs as well as to generate revenue to support our projects. We need some initial investment to print these products in order to start distribution.

Reef Check Adventures Kids Book: \$15,000

Underwater Guide: \$15,000

Reef Check Townsville: Unfortunately Envirofund did not support our Palm Islands survey expeditions this time around. We are looking for \$15,000 for each 6 day trip to survey 5 sites around the Palm Island Group. We ultimately aim to conduct these surveys twice per year.

Contacts database: We are looking for \$10,000 to assist us to finish our much-needed contacts database, which will enable us to kick-off our international membership program.

Public Education: We are looking for an investment of \$15,000 per location to help run a local educational event in Townsville, Cairns/Port Douglas, Airlie Beach, Mackay, Rockhampton, Noosa, Gold Coast and Perth.

Reef Check Australia Website: We are seeking a \$15,000 annual investment to assist us in keeping our website up to date with informative information on our projects and coral reefs for our members.

Training Courses: We are seeking funds to run training courses at additional locations. Apart from our training fee, we are looking for \$6000 per course of 8 students to assist with coordination, training facilities and trips to the reef. These amounts can include in-kind reef access and use of facilities.

Reef Check Coordinators: We aim to establish Reef Check Coordinators in a number of locations through Australia to train new volunteers, coordinate surveys, and seek new funding and partnership opportunities. We are currently seeking funds to support coordinators in the Gold Coast, Noosa, Cairns, Mackay and Perth in WA.

Administration and IT Support: We are looking for \$15,000 per annum to support an administration assistant for our head office as well as to assist with our IT.

Other thanks

We are proud to thank the multitude of businesses, organisations and academic institutions that support us. However, special thanks to the Townsville City Council for their ongoing support with office space, and to Sunsea Cruises for their enormous support of our training program in Townsville.

Thank you to: Adrenalin Dive, Affordable Charters, Association of Marine Park Tourism Operators, Calypso, Canon, Creek to Coral, Cruise Whitsundays, Dive the Reef, Down Under Dive, Envirofund, Ergon Energy, Fantasea Cruises, Queensland Gambling Community Benefit Fund, Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, Haba Dive, Hayman Island Resort, James Cook University Dive Club, Ocean Dive, Pleasure Divers (Magnetic Island), Poseidon Dive, Pro Dive Cairns, Pro Dive Townsville, Quicksilver Connections, Quicksilver International, Reef Magic Cruises, Reef and Rainforest Research Centre, Reef Safari (Magnetic Island), Remote Area Dive, Scuba Schools International, Sunferries, Sunsea Cruises, Sunshine Foundation, Tanscar Charters, Townsville City Council, Townsville Scuba Club, Tropical Diving, Tusa Dive, and Undersea Explorer.