



Australian Government

Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts

Marine and Tropical Sciences Research Facility Milestone Report, 31 March 2009

Program 1: **Status and Trends of Species and Ecosystems in the Great Barrier Reef**

Project 1.1.2: **Condition and trend of the Great Barrier Reef ecosystem: Indicators, thresholds of potential concern, and ecological influence of the Great Barrier Reef Zoning Plan on mid and outer shelf reefs**

Task Leaders: **Jos Hill / Marie-Lise Schläppy, Reef Check Australia**

Summary

Project 1.1.2 is progressing according to plan and milestones to date are being met. Several communication materials for dive operators have been finalised and sent to the operators. Feedback on these materials has been obtained. To date, Reef Check Australia (RCA) has conducted two training courses in Townsville and another two in Port Douglas.

Upcoming activities include monitoring sites along the Great Barrier Reef (GBR), distributing our communication materials on-board supporting dive operators, providing dive operators with site reports from our new database as well as communicating to end-users on how to acquire future data reports from our website.

Project Outputs / Milestones

Targeted Activity	Due Date
• Reports describing outputs of workshops / individual meetings with operator managers to acquire feedback on communication / interpretation materials.	31 March 2009

Project Results

Description of the results achieved for this milestone

This project is currently on track. Activities undertaken include:

- Development and printing of an information brochure (Figure 1a):** These brochures were funded by Envirofund, have been sent to the operators and are being put on board vessels by managers. Our project officers will bring additional brochures when they go surveying with that particular operator.

- b) **Production of an information DVD (Figure 1b):** This DVD was developed by a Reef Check Australia volunteer and features a fifteen-minute film about Reef Check Australia which can be shown on live-aboard boats or day cruises boats.
- c) **Development and printing of a laminated information booklet (Figure 1c):** The information booklet was in part funded by the MTSRF (RRRC) and GBRMPA.
- d) **Reef Check Australia quarterly newsletter:** We have updated the format and content of our quarterly newsletter to html. This format will increase readership by allowing the newsletter to be read directly from email instead of through an attachment. We acquired email contacts for the crew from operator managers during 2008 and have requested newsletters are passed onto crew.
- e) **Operator Information Pack:** We are currently updating the content of our Operator Information Pack to include information on how Reef Check Australia operates. This pack will likely also include site reports from our new database.

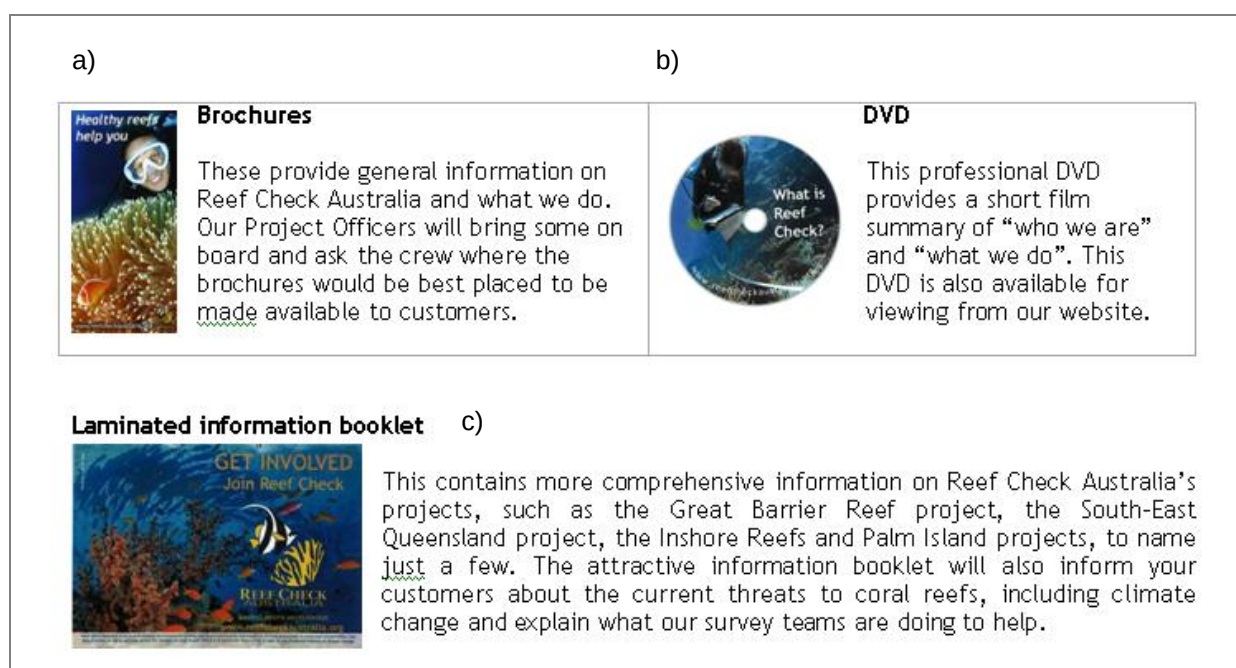


Figure 1(a-c): Reef Check Australia communication materials.

As requested by the dive operators during 2008 meetings, communication materials have been sent to managers for review, but will be taken on board by our volunteers as they visit to ensure the crew are familiar with them.

A 2009 Update for the Great Barrier Reef project is at Attachment 1.

Problems and Opportunities

Professional printing of interpretation materials is beyond the scope of our MTSRF budget. To date, printing has been undertaken in-house (when alternative funds have not been available), but we would like to source additional funds to support outsourcing printing in the future to enable a professional look.

Communications, major activities or events

During milestone reporting period

1. **Great Barrier Reef surveys:** We have commenced the survey season relatively late due to heavy precipitation in February 2009. The list of sites already being monitored is as follows:
 1. Moore Reef (RCA survey and Crown-of-thorns Starfish response survey) (two sites)
 2. Agincourt Reef: Phil's reef (two sites)
 3. Agincourt 3D Pontoon (two sites)
 4. Agincourt 4B: Harry's Bommie
 5. Agincourt Reef: The Point
 6. Agincourt Reef : Anybody's
 7. Opal Reef: South North Opal reef
 8. North Opal Reef: Cathedrals
 9. South Opal Reef (two sites: Bashful Bommie)
 10. South Opal Reef: Split Bommie
 11. South Opal Reef: The Wedge
 12. South Opal Reef : Two Tone
2. **Reef Check Australia contacts database:** Further development work has already been carried out on the contacts database which enhances our ability to manage our volunteers, their certifications and operators' information. We aim to continue updating our contacts database through 2009/2010 so that the training level of Reef Check Australia volunteers can be tracked. To enable the full functionality of our contacts database, we will need to secure additional funds and will endeavour to do so through 2009. The contacts database was partly supported by the MTSRF and partly by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA).
3. **Reef Check Australia monitoring database:** Progress is made with our monitoring database and Phase 1 is nearly completed. We are busy attending to the last modifications necessary after testing the system which enables online data entry by Reef Check Australia volunteers and easy data-sharing between other databases such as the Reef Atlas. Basic data reporting through Google Earth™ is available (Figure 2). Our dive industry partners indicated in the 2008 feedback survey that this was the preferred method for data reporting. The automated production of reports is being finalised (Figure 3). The dive operators have been made aware of this new development and will be notified when the reports are be available online through our website. The monitoring database was funded by GBRMPA, Coastcare and Envirofund. The creation of the database is planned in different phases. This will enable us to acquire stakeholder feedback and improve on the functionality in Phase 2. Additional funds will be required to carry out the subsequent phases of this project.
4. **Training courses:** We ran two training courses in Townsville (September 2008 and January 2009) and two training courses in Port Douglas (October 2008 and March 2009), resulting in 31 new volunteers. There are now 127 trained volunteers in Queensland.

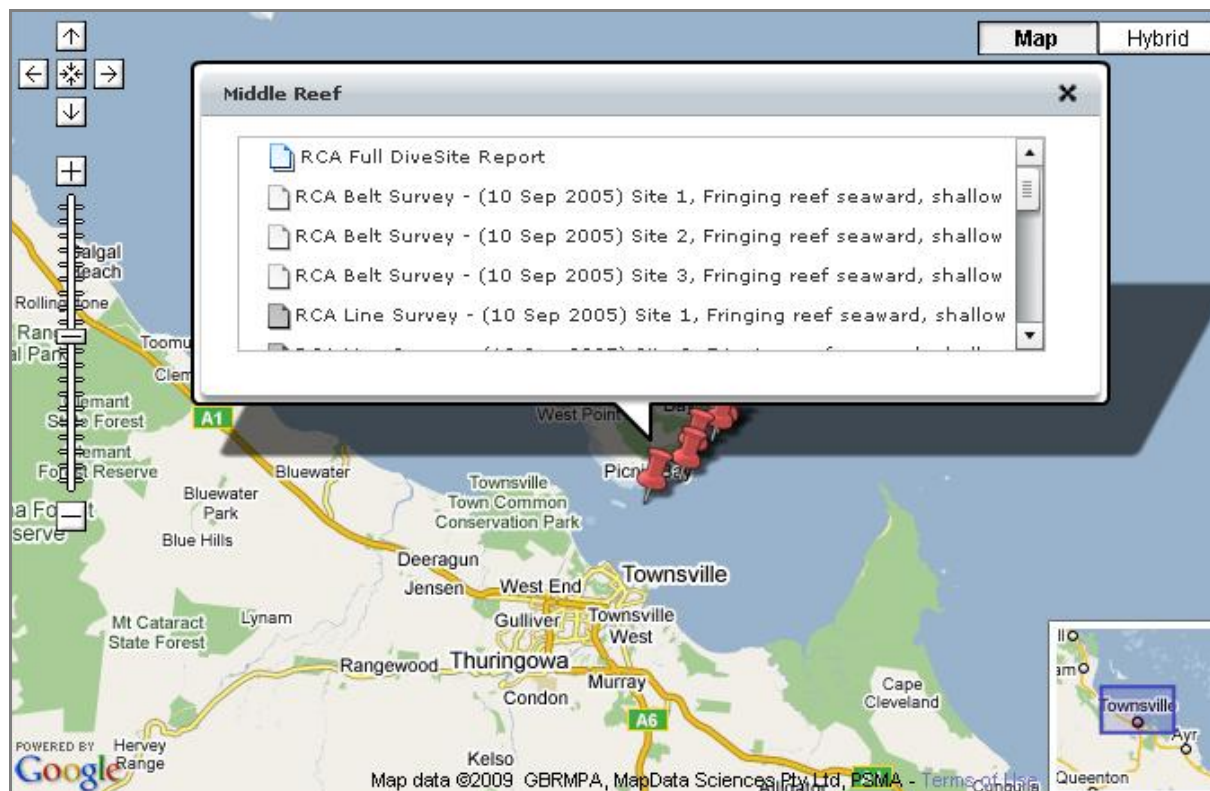


Figure 2: Example of the Reef Check Australia Google layer with access to survey data.

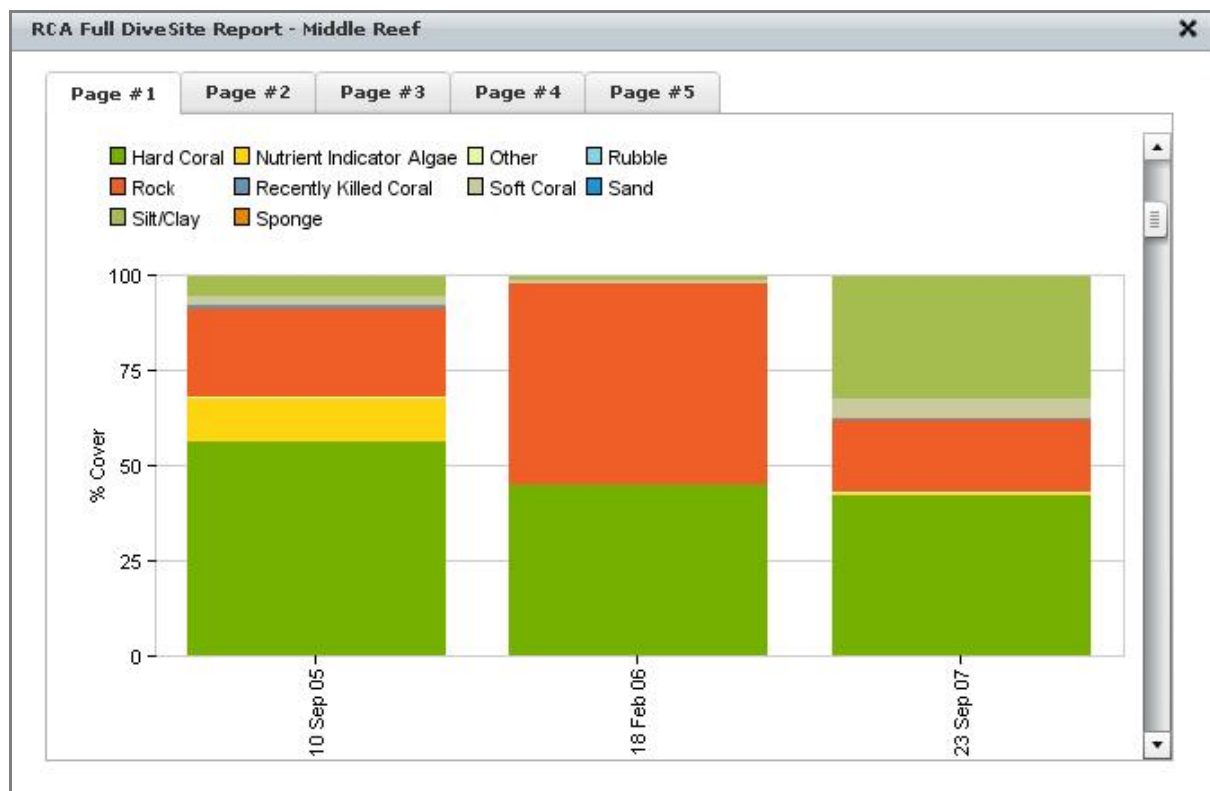


Figure 3: Example of automated reports from Reef Check Australia's database.

5. **Newsletters:** Reef Check Australia newsletters are released on a quarterly basis and are currently being distributed to the members listed in our contacts database (see latest newsletter – Attachment 2). Newsletters have been sent to the increasing numbers of Reef Check Australia members as well as to our stakeholders. We have also sent a specific newsletter to our dive operator contacts following this year's survey season as well as a copy of the 2008 status report of the dive sites monitored by Reef Check Australia volunteers.
6. **Training of two new project officers:** Our two new project officers, Joel Stibbard and Nick Greenwood started their internship with Reef Check Australia in January, have participated in our training course and are now fully trained to conduct the Great Barrier Reef surveys with our volunteers.
7. **Reef Check Australia photography competition, "What do coral reefs mean to you?"** The overall aim of this competition was to raise public and political awareness of the importance of responding to climate change and other global threats to coral reefs. This year's competition was a success with 139 entries. Winners were announced during October (see Attachment 3). Since the announcement of the winners, two Australian papers have showcased the competition. The photography competition in 2007/2008 has increased membership of Reef Check Australia by 8.5%.

During next milestone reporting period

1. Proceed with volunteer surveys of 25 dive sites.
2. Distribute initial data reports from our data database to stakeholders and inform them of how to obtain the report themselves through our website.
3. Make the Reef Check Australia monitoring data available to the MTSRF Reef Atlas (Project 1.1.5).

Forecast variations to planned milestones

This survey season has started rather late due to heavy precipitation in North Queensland in January and February 2009. We will do our absolute best to complete the surveys on time for the next milestone report but are anticipating that some delay may occur.

Communication update from operators' feedback

This component has been completed.

1. Brochures: Providing general information on Reef Check Australia and what we do.
2. Laminated information booklet: Providing comprehensive information on Reef Check Australia's projects; basic coral reef knowledge including importantly the threats they are facing; and other coral reef conservation projects in the area.
3. DVD planned for 2009/2010.
4. Flip chart for RCA Team Scientists to use as a five-minute presentation tool for tourists.
5. Poster.



Great Barrier Reef Project 2009 Update

Happy 2009! Firstly, we would like to extend a warm “Thank you!” on behalf of Reef Check Australia for your ongoing support. Please find attached an overview of our plans for this year’s survey season. We have a number of exciting educational and communication activities planned this year and we look forward to working with you to deliver successful outcomes.

Project Funding

Between 2006 and 2008 we received \$50 000 pa from MTSRF to support our GBR Project and another \$100 000 from GBRMPA to support our GBR project, online database, coral trout monitoring project development and our Indigenous engagement project on Palm Island.

For the period from 2008 to 2009, we have received \$50 000 from MTSRF to support the GBR project so we will be running on a tight budget and only able to monitor 25 dive sites. This year GBRMPA is providing \$50 000 to support the development of our online database with phase 1 scheduled for completion later this year.

We greatly value not only this Project Funding Support, but the incredible in-kind support we receive from you all, which makes our Survey work possible - this continued support is greatly appreciated during the current difficult economic conditions.

Communication materials

Last year, we conducted research on which communication materials would be most beneficial to dive operators to provide information for the crew and tourists onboard. As discussed last year we plan to distribute these materials as part of an Operator Information Pack. The materials include the following:

Completed

1. Brochures: *Providing general information on Reef Check Australia and what we do.*
2. Laminated information booklet: *Providing comprehensive information on Reef Check Australia’s projects; basic coral reef knowledge including importantly the threats they are facing; and other coral reef conservation projects in the area.*
3. DVD

Planned for 2009 /10

4. Flip chart for RCA Team Scientists to use as a 5-minute presentation tool to tourists
5. Poster

6. PowerPoint presentation

We will be sending these communication materials to Dive Operator Managers as well as distributing them on the boats during surveys via our Project Officers and volunteers (as requested by Operators). Project Officers will also be on hand to introduce the communication materials and answer any questions. Once we have distributed these we may be contacting you by phone to request feedback and kindly request your cooperation in this matter. It is important to us that we produce informational materials that are of use to you so we appreciate all feedback that can help us do this.

Volunteer Training

We have conducted two training courses in Townsville and two in Port Douglas so far this financial year. We have one further course planned for Port Douglas in March. If any of your crew is interested in participating, as some of you suggested, please do let us know. And of course, a big thank you to all those operators who have supported these courses this year.

Crew Feedback System

Last year, we developed an Operator Information Pack and an operator comments form. The Operator Information Pack is destined to the crew and gives information on “who we are” and “what we do”. The contents of the Operator Information Pack will be updated by the Project Officers when they come onboard. The operator comments form allows your dive supervisor or skipper to provide us with feedback about our survey volunteers on board your boats. The aim of this system is to inform us if and where improvements need to be made to our program.

Overall, we received very positive feedback from crew members during the last survey season. Some suggestions for improvement included increasing interaction between survey volunteers and tourists to better communicate the reason for our presence on board. If requested, our Project Officers will be more than happy to do a short presentation onboard detailing what their survey team will be doing. Survey volunteers will also be available for communication with tourists onboard to share their extensive knowledge of our program on coral reefs.

Coral reef monitoring ~ 2009 GBR Project Survey Season Plans

First of all, we welcome Joel (Australia) and Nick (U.K.) who will be our new volunteer Project Officers (surveys@reefcheckaustralia.org) working with our supporters and volunteers to coordinate our 2009 survey season. During this year’s survey season, we aim to monitor at least 25 of the following sites:

#	Location/Site name	Reef Name	Location
1	Cathedrals	North Opal Reef	Port Douglas
2	SNO	Opal Reef	Port Douglas
3	Split Bommie	South Opal Reef	Port Douglas
4	The Wedge	South Opal Reef	Port Douglas
5	North Point	St Crispin Reef	Port Douglas
6	Playground	Agincourt Reef	Port Douglas
7	Two tonne	South Opal Reef	Port Douglas
8	Bashful Bommie	South Opal Reef	Port Douglas
9	Flare Point	Ribbon Reef # 3	Port Douglas
10	12 Apostles	Agincourt Reef	Port Douglas

11	Barracuda Bommie	Agincourt Reef	Port Douglas
12	End of the World	Agincourt Reef No. 4	Port Douglas
13	Phil's Reef	Agincourt Reef	Port Douglas
14	The Point	Agincourt Reef	Port Douglas
15	Agincourt (Pontoon)	Agincourt Reef 2d	Port Douglas
16	Agincourt (Pontoon)	Agincourt Reef 3d	Port Douglas
17	Low Isles	Low Isles	Port Douglas
18	Harrys Bommie	Agincourt Reef No. 4b	Port Douglas
19	Clam Beds	Ribbon Reef # 3	Port Douglas
20	Tracy's Wonderland	Ribbon Reef # 3	Port Douglas
21	Challenger Bay	Ribbon Reef # 10	Port Douglas
22	Pixie Gardens	Ribbon Reef # 10	Port Douglas
23	North Horn	Osprey Reef	Port Douglas
24	Admiralty Anchor	Osprey Reef	Port Douglas
25	Briggs Reef	Briggs Reef	Cairns
26	Flynn Reef	Flynn Reef	Cairns
27	Hastings Reef (North)	Hastings Reef	Cairns
28	Hastings Reef (North)	Hastings Reef	Cairns
29	Hastings Reef (South)	Hastings Reef	Cairns
30	Moore Reef	Moore Reef	Cairns
31	Norman Reef North (Atlantic clipper)	Norman Reef North	Cairns
32	Norman Reef South	Norman Reef South	Cairns
33	Saxon Reef	Saxon Reef	Cairns
34	Swimming Pool	Milln Reef	Cairns
35	Knuckle Reef	Knuckle Reef	Airlie Beach
36	Hardy Reef	Hardy Reef	Airlie Beach
37	Blue Pearl Bay	Hayman Island	Airlie Beach
38	Hamilton Island	Hamilton Island	Airlie Beach
39	Daydream island	Daydream Island	Airlie Beach

Communication Programs

Reef Check Data

The most important part of collecting data is ensuring it is available and used for the sustainable management of our coral reefs. To this end, we have made significant progress in developing our online data reporting system which will dramatically improve our capacity to disseminate survey data to a wide audience. The principal aim of this data reporting system is to ensure we provide timely and user-friendly reporting of our data that is easily accessible by the dive industry, the general community, researchers and managers involved in coral reef conservation and academia.



We will also be sending you site reports later in the survey season and look forward to your feedback.

Other Reef Check Australia projects

Education ~ Reef IQ

We will be launching our new educational program for young people, **Reef IQ**, in June 2009 (education@reefcheckaustralia.org). This program has been extensively developed over the last 18 months resulting in a set of innovative, high-quality, educational materials that will be available free online. These materials focus on developing general coral reef knowledge, encouraging sustainable practices to help protect coral reefs, and introducing coral reef monitoring to young people. This project is generously supported by funding from the Australian Government's Caring for our Country.

Reef Check SE Queensland

We have recently received a Caring for our Country Coastcare grant to substantially scale up our South East Queensland project. To enable us to do this, we aim to recruit a full-time coordinator to run this project in the coming months. Over the next 18 months, survey volunteers in South East Queensland will monitor 15 sites between the Sunshine Coast and the Gold Coast, with a number of sites surveyed situated in protected Ramsar wetlands.

Coral Trout Monitoring

We have also recently received a Caring for our Country Coastcare grant to launch our coral trout monitoring program for tourists and recreational fishers. Participants will be able to conduct surveys as timed swims on their visits to the reef and enter their data into our online database.

GBR Project Partners:



Thank you for supporting Reef Check Australia



Reef Check Australia | [CHECK-UP](#) | February 2009

Dear %%First_Name%%

Welcome to the first edition of the new-look Reef Check Australia newsletter. This issue introduces our new team members, heralds the start of a new survey season, profiles one of our valued supporters, introduces our latest education project and celebrates the arrival of some new grants!

We hope you enjoy finding out what we've been up to recently and what our plans are for the near future. Thanks again for all your support and keep spreading the Reef Check Australia word!

We'd love to hear what you think about our newsletter so do let us know if you have any comments or contributions by emailing us at support@reefcheckaustralia.org

Jos Hill
Managing Director



LET THE SURVEYS COMMENCE

It's a new year, the heavens have opened, the stinger suits are out - it must be time for a new Reef Check survey season! In preparation, our new team of enthusiastic Townsville trainees have completed their theory tests and battled through 3m viz on Maggie to achieve their recognition as qualified Reef Check Australia surveyors.

Meanwhile, up in Cairns/Port Douglas, more volunteers are set to complete their fish and video transect specialities to become fully trained Reef Checkers.

Well done one and all!



If you're qualified you'd like to join us for the 2009 season, look out for the new survey timetable heading your way soon. If you're not, there are still a few spaces left on our Port Douglas fish and video training course starting 13th March. So, to claim your spot, email support@reefcheckaustralia.org and get involved!

IN THE SPOTLIGHT



Sponsor Profile | 1770 Reef Explorers

Jada Cavanaugh's select operation, 1770 Reef Explorers, works in partnership with Reef Check Australia to offer an extra dimension to the Great Barrier Reef experience. With marine ecology information packages on board, snorkelers can take part in useful reef health research whilst enjoying the stunning underwater scenery.

As our first dive operator sponsor, 1770 Reef Explorers are creating a fantastic opportunity to raise a consistent source of funds for Reef Check Australia projects by contributing \$5 from every passenger. We hope that this new relationship proves to be very successful for both partners and that more operators will come on board in the future.

Jada says about the new partnership: "I'm very proud to be working with Reef Check Australia and very proud to mention them on my vessel's tours! Every time I take my passengers out to the Reef I feel comforted to know that they're out there to help the very reef we care so much about. Thank you and keep up the very good work!"



1770 Reef Explorers take small groups on memorable trips out to secluded Green (Protected) Zones, just over an hour from 1770 Marina on their 10m cougar cat. All snorkel equipment and wetsuits are provided and a tasty organic lunch is served on deck.

With their strong environmental focus and enthusiastic, knowledgeable team, 1770 Reef Explorers offers a unique adventure on the Great Barrier Reef. Visit www.1770reefexplorers.com.au to find out more.

HAVE A LITTLE CARE

The Australian Government's Coastcare program has officially recognised the great work done by Reef Check Australia. This year, we have managed to secure four Caring for our Country Community grants through successful applications to fund ongoing and future projects.

Caring for our Country is an Australian Government initiative that seeks to achieve an environment that is healthy, better protected, well managed and resilient, and provides essential ecosystem services in a changing climate.

These grants will help to support our following projects:

1. Community coral trout monitoring
2. Reef IQ: Youth education program
3. Reef Check coral reef health database
4. Reef Check South East Queensland

Many of our projects urgently need additional sponsorship to achieve their full potential. If you are interested in partnering with Reef Check Australia and would like to find out about the sponsorship opportunities available, please visit our [Sponsorship webpage](#).



FUTURE FOCUS: EDUCATION



With further funds successfully secured from the last round of Caring for Our Country Coastcare Grants, Reef IQ, our educational program for young people, is now moving into the next stage!

Over the next few months we will be carrying out focus groups with teachers and young people to ensure our materials are fun and engaging; and to help us further protect Australia's beautiful coral reefs through behavioural change.

If you are a teacher or a young person aged 7-12 years old and are interested in participating in one of these focus groups please contact Jo Roberts at education@reefcheckaustralia.org for more information.

NEW RECRUITS

A very warm welcome to some valuable new members of staff at Reef Check Australia HQ!

Dr. Marie-Lise Schläppy has joined us from Switzerland as Science Operations Manager to offer some much needed help, co-ordinating all the important science matters and managing the implementation of the research projects that are the fundamental basis of the data we provide. Marie-Lise answers to science@reefcheckaustralia.org.

Nick Greenwood and Joel Stibbard are settling into their roles, volunteering as Project Officers, setting up and running all the surveys for the 2009 season. If you're planning to join our survey trips this season, you'll be hearing from them very soon on surveys@reefcheckaustralia.org once they've untangled all the survey tapes!

Newly enlisted volunteer managing Communications and PR is Gemma Routledge, who hopes to revolutionise the website and get Reef Check Australia all the press attention it deserves. She'd love to hear from you with any great ideas to communications@reefcheckaustralia.org



For more information, visit www.reefcheckaustralia.org

MTSRF Project 1.1.2 March 2009 Milestone Report - Attachment 2

If you've received this email from a friend and you'd like to subscribe to the newsletter, [please click here](#)

You have received this newsletter because you have given Reef Check Australia your email address . If you would prefer not to receive any further emails, please [Unsubscribe](#) or email communications@reefcheckaustralia.org with UNSUBSCRIBE in the subject line.

Reef Check Australia is a registered not for profit organisation and is a registered Environmental Organisation. Reef Check Australia is entitled under the Income Tax Assessment Act 1997 item 6.1.1 of subsection 30-55(1) to receive tax deductible donations. Any individual, company, trust or charity that makes a donation will receive a receipt for use in the preparation of their tax return.

PO Box 404, Townsville, QLD 4810. Tel +61 7 4724 3950. Reef Check Foundation Ltd. (Australia) ABN: 46 108 200 933. Registered Australian charity with tax deductible gift recipient status.



What do coral reefs mean to you?

Photography Competition 2008



Pictures speak a thousand words

In celebration of the Second International Year of the Reef, Reef Check Australia and Project AWARE partnered to promote the “What do coral reefs mean to you?” photography competition.

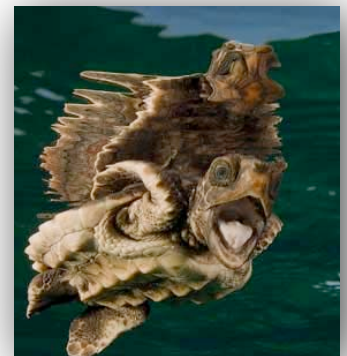
This competition was designed to showcase the multitude of different ways that ‘we’ value our reefs. These “values” include social activities and recreational pastimes such as diving, snorkeling, sailing and fishing, traditional cultural activities for many indigenous Australians and commercial ventures such as tourism and gathering seafood. The overall aim of the competition is to raise public and political awareness of the importance of responding to climate change and other global threats to coral reefs.

Reef Check Australia Photographer of the Year 2008

Overall Winner:

Steve Rosenberg (Screamer)

Prize: 1 x 6 day, 6 night Osprey Reef Shark Encounter trip for 1 person worth \$2215 on board Undersea Explorer and “The Great Barrier Reef” book by Steve Parish.



Overall Second Place

Chris Hamilton (Found You)

Prize: 1 x weekend sail and dive trip on board New Horizon and 2 DVDs of choice from the Australian Natural History Unit.

PO Box 404, Townsville, QLD 4810. Tel +61 7 4724 3950 www.reefcheckaustralia.org

Reef Check Foundation Ltd. (Australia) ABN: 46 108 200 933

Registered Australian charity with tax deductible gift recipient status.

Overall Third Place

Sascha Unger (Gentle Giant)

Prize: 1 x underwater photography course by PADI and 2 DVDs of choice from the Australian Natural History Unit.



Voter's Choice

Damien Siviero (nudibranch)

Prize: Intova IC 500 Digital camera from Digital Divers & Reef Teach.

Category: People and the Reef

Category Winner:

Chris Hamilton (What's below)

Prize: 1 pair of Maui Jim Sunglasses worth \$219



Category Runner Up:

Gary Brennand (Wally and me)

Prize: Dive mask by Cape Byron Imports

Category Second Runner Up:

Seanna Cronin (Shark Bay)

Roger Beeden (Bleaching Nemo)

Prize: Selection of Quiksilver Merchandise



Category: Icons of the Reef

Category Winner:

Sascha Unger (Gentle Giant)

Prize: 1 pair of Maui Jim Sunglasses worth \$219



Category Runner Up:

Gary Brennand (Fly)

Prize: Dive mask by Oceanic



Category Second Runner Up:

Joint Winners:

Justin Gilligan (Unexpected Surprise!)

Matt Curnock (Eyeconic)

Prize: Selection of Quiksilver Merchandise



Category: Animal Behaviour

Category Winner:

Steve Rosenberg (Screamer)

Prize: 1 pair of Maui Jim Sunglasses worth \$219

Category Runner Up:

Chris Jones (Seranid Swallows)

Prize: Dive mask by Oceanic



Category Second Runner Up:

Chris Hamilton (Devour your brother)

Prize: Selection of Quiksilver Merchandise



Category: The Reef in Our Hands

Category Winner:

Justin Gilligan (Taking The Bait)

Prize: 1 pair of Maui Jim Sunglasses worth \$219



Category Runner Up:

Dean Cropp (The New Generation Swims By)

Prize: Dive mask by Cape Byron Imports



Category Second Runner Up:

Chris Jones (Nautilus Release)

Prize: Selection of Quiksilver Merchandise

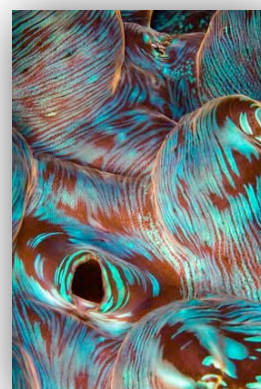


Category: Creative Visions of the Reef

Category Winner:

Chris Hamilton (Found You)

Prize: 1 pair of Maui Jim Sunglasses worth \$219



Category Runner Up:

Sascha Unger (Fragile World)

Prize: Dive mask by Cape Byron Imports



Category Second Runner Up:

Roger Beeden (Lady Elliot Magic)

Prize: Selection of Quiksilver Merchandise

Highly Commended

Silke Baron (Results of Dynamite Fishing)
Steve Rosenberg (Caribbean reef Shark at the surface)

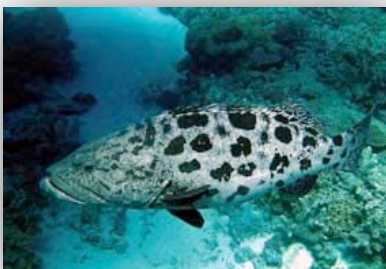
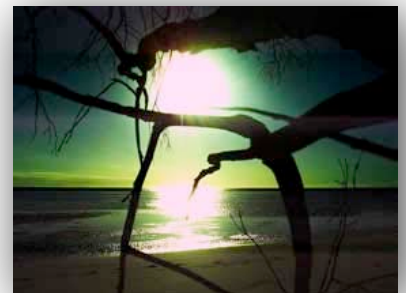
Prize: Selection of Quiksilver Merchandise



Reef Check Australia Young Photographer of the Year 2008

Catti Butler (Creative Sunset?)

Prize: Dive trip on SunSea Cruises and 1 x PADI Underwater Photography Course



Young Photographer Animal Behaviour Category Winner

Andrew Jeffries (Potato Cod)

Prize: Selection of Quiksilver Merchandise