



REEF Check Australia director, Jos Hill (foreground), and local volunteer, Zoe Andrews, lay a tape in preparation for a survey

Photo: Roger Beeden 2012/20

Reef cleaning project

THE Townsville branch of Reef Check Australia is organising a fishing debris clean up at Orpheus and Pelorus Islands on Saturday to mark International Earth Day.

Local volunteers are getting behind the event and will restore the sites by reporting on and removing fishing line and other assorted debris from reefs around the islands to improve the local environment.

This part of the project will be completed in alliance with GBRMPA, James Cook University Dive Club and with the support (in part) by funds from the PADI Project AWARE Foundation of \$1200.

Reef Check Australia managing director in Townsville, Jos Hill, said the day had been organised following concerns from the local community that poaching had been occurring within protected marine zones.

"The cleared site will become a baseline for regular Reef Check and James Cook University monitoring of coral reef health, fish size and abundance, and also the incidence of new fishing debris, which may be an indication of

poaching within GBRMPA green zones," Ms Hill said.

"The findings of this project will be communicated to the wider community, and used by GBRMPA and Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service to review and perhaps make changes to their current marine management practices."

Ms Hill said although Australia's coral reefs were some of the best protected in the world, they were not immune to these threats.

The Reef Check Foundation is calling on people in the twin cities to pledge their support on the day for Reef Check's International Declaration of Reef Rights.

A goal of one million signatures has been set with the declaration to be presented to the Heads of State of all 191 countries with coral reefs during the International Year of the Reef, 2008.

People can view and pledge support by visiting www.reefcheck.org/petition/petition.php. To find out more about volunteering on the day phone Reef Check on 4724 2650.

—CASEY-ANN SEANIGER