



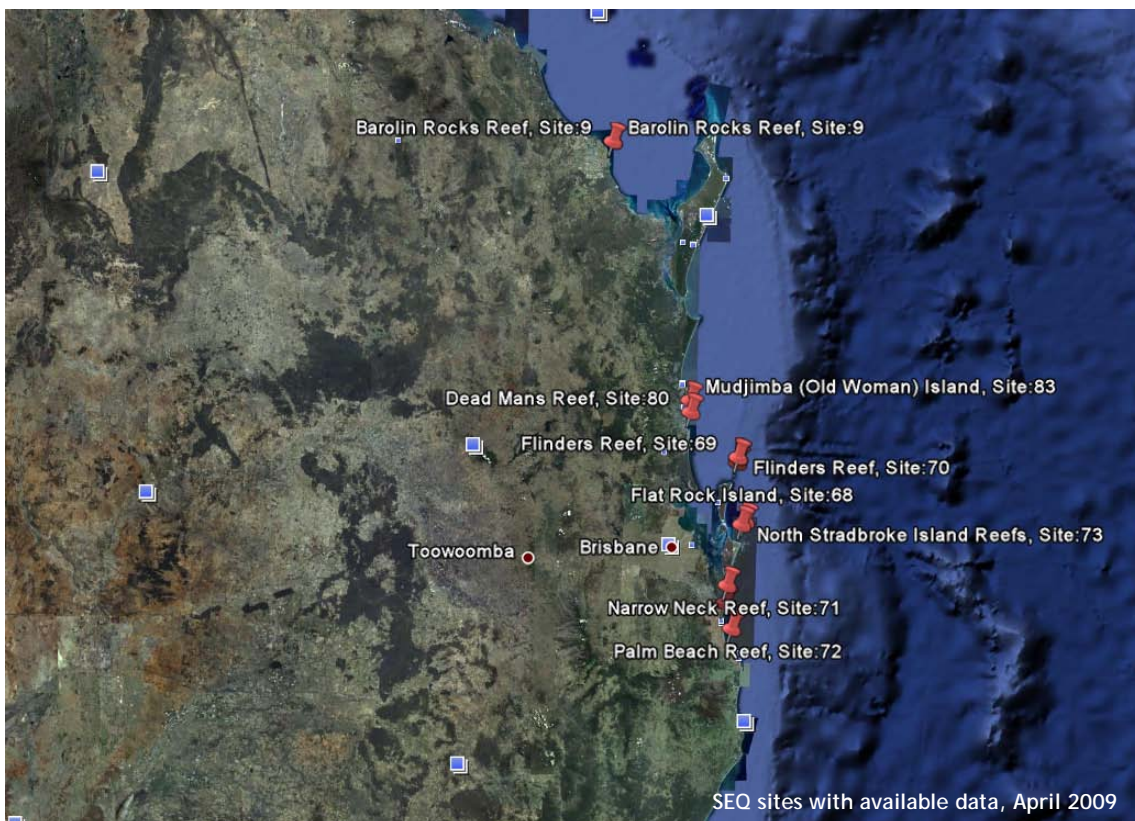
REEF CHECK AUSTRALIA

SOUTH EAST QUEENSLAND | PROJECT FACTSHEET

MAY 2009

Following on from the success of the flagship Great Barrier Reef Project, Reef Check Australia (RCA) has broadened its sphere of operations to encompass a permanent full-time regional office in South East Queensland (SEQ) from Winter 2009.

The SEQ co-ordinator, Jenn Loder, has dual bases in Brisbane and the Gold Coast and manages RCA training courses for community volunteers as well as carrying out high quality RCA standard monitoring on 15 sites across the artificial and fringing reefs between the Sunshine Coast and the Gold Coast, including the important Ramsar wetlands site at Moreton Bay. The data collected provides important coral reef status and trend information on high priority hotspot sites to natural resource managers for use in Water Improvement Protection Programs.



More than monitoring

Through the SEQ regional operations, Reef Check Australia is building the capacity of the general public in the region to collect information on the health of important South East Queensland fringing coral reefs that are under threat from significant coastal development and water quality pollution.

The South East Queensland Catchments Ltd has identified a lack of awareness about the coral reefs as a potential hindrance to the success of their Water Quality Improvement Program. Therefore, a key focus of the RCA SEQ program is increasing local public awareness about coral reef issues on their doorstep. As a first for RCA, advanced market research techniques are being utilised amongst the local population to

discover the specific barriers to adopting environmentally-sustainable lifestyle. These then form a basis for a high profile campaign to achieve real behavioural change in specific populations.

Training with sharks

All SEQ volunteers enjoy a unique training experience thanks to Seaworld's generous donation of the Shark Bay Reef Lagoon for RCA use. The huge tank where volunteers are put through their paces as potential RCA surveyors contains real reef structures and is home to some diver-friendly sharks and other large reef fish. Of course safety is paramount for all RCA activities so the only danger is that they might not pass their stringent ID tests.



Scientific significance

This project provides valuable information where there is currently a serious data gap, and the condition of the fringing reefs is currently unknown. However, water quality pollution from continued urban development is a serious issue within the catchment. It is important to determine the health of these reefs to ensure these valuable resources are maintained and impacts can be identified and mitigated. Through the provision of status and trends information to South East Queensland Catchments Ltd managers, systems can be developed to mitigate identified threats and pressures (such as coastal development, water quality pollution and Climate Change), which will help to maintain and enhance biodiversity through improved ecosystem resilience.

Powerful partnerships

In recognition of the value of Reef Check Australia's data, South East Queensland Catchments Natural Resource Management Board is integrating data from the SEQ project into their catchment database for use in their Water Quality Improvement Program. The organisation also provided substantial seed funding to help establish the project in 2007.

Envirofund financed the project in 2008 and, in the new incarnation of Caring for Our Country, also awarded a grant for ongoing operations in 2009/10.

Sea World is a major in-kind supporter, providing office space for the SEQ co-ordinator as well as training facilities in Shark Bay and valuable marketing and communications resources.

The University of Queensland kindly donates office space in conjunction with ongoing advisory support.

Like the flagship GBR project, the SEQ program is hugely reliant on the in-kind support of a number of small boat operators by way of reduced rate berths space for training and surveys. Most importantly, the SEQ program is only possible thanks to the commitment of our community volunteers generously donating their time to complete surveys.

Additional support is provided through successful partnerships with the following:

- Environmental Protection Agency/Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service
- Griffith University
- Coral Watch / Project AWARE
- Ocean Cat
- Diving the Gold Coast
- University of the Sunshine Coast
- Noosa Council
- Noosa Integrated Catchment Association
- Tourism Sunshine Coast
- Tourism Noosa
- University of Queensland Dive Club