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Spirit of the Reef Award *Jos Hill at Reef Check Australia*

In recognition of eight years of hard work in the field of coral reef conservation, Jos Hill, Managing Director of Reef Check Australia has received the inaugural Spirit of the Reef Award. The award was presented by Andy Dunstan, Board Director, in celebration of the unique contribution Jos has made to research on the Great Barrier Reef. The award was presented at a surprise party held at Marta's Gallery in Townsville last Thursday 19th March.

Since 2001 when Jos first established Reef Check Australia in Townsville as a regional office for Reef Check International, the company has grown from strength to strength and is now recognised throughout Queensland as a source of valuable data on coral reef health. This data is regularly used by marine park managers and provides an invaluable contribution to the biannual "Status of Coral Reefs of the World" publications. The original Reef Check Australia training course, now modified for international use to equip recreational volunteer divers to collect precise scientific data on coral reef health, was created by Jos to find an effective way to gather scientific data in a cost-effective method.

From humble beginnings during her Master's at James Cook University, working out of internet cafés and from payphones, Jos is rightly proud of the growth in Reef Check Australia's reputation and capacity. The charity now employs two full-time members of staff, as well as three volunteer interns on a seasonal basis and has plans to set up a full time project office in South East Queensland in the near future. With a solid foundation and exciting times ahead for Reef Check Australia, Jos now feels able to take a break from her role as Managing Director and is intending to complete an MBA in Sustainable Management over in California. Speaking of her decision, Jos says: "I'm very pleased to be leaving Reef Check Australia in the capable hands of a great team. My intention from the very start was to set up a sustainable organisation that could run without me and I feel that I've achieved this now. I look forward to seeing our new projects pan out successfully over the coming year and I shall still continue to be involved at Board level, making sure that the Reef Check Australia vision lives on."

The team that Jos has put in place to continue her mission comprises: Dr Marie-Lise Schläppy as Science Operations Manager, managing the volunteer Project Officers in organising the volunteer surveys and maintaining the scientific standards for which the charity has become renowned; Jo Roberts as Education and Outreach Officer, creating and implementing educational training materials, workshops and programs to engage and raise awareness in the community; and Mark Miller, Board Chair and acting Business Manager, who generously donates his time and expertise in raising the organisation's profile and seeking opportunities to create a sustainable future. Of Jos's departure, Mark says: "We are very fortunate that Jos has set up such a solid organisation with a strong vision for the future and a successful formula. Our challenge will now be to move on to the next level, extending our project fields and geographic coverage by securing new partnerships and like-minded sponsors."

Reef Check Australia will continue to monitor the existing Great Barrier Reef and South East Queensland fringing reef sites as well as launching a new monitoring project later in 2009.



Reef Check Australia

Reef Check Australia is an award-winning, not-for-profit organisation combining education and research to result in the protection and rehabilitation of the world's coral reefs. Established in 2001 by one passionate individual with a strong vision, the charity has inspired over 100 volunteers to train using a scientifically standardised protocol in established monitoring techniques and now collects and distributes valuable data on reef health to marine resource managers and the wider scientific community. This data can provide vital early-warnings of a decline in reef health.

With a professional approach and recognised integrity, Reef Check Australia works in collaboration with community and industry partners to raise awareness, both locally and further afield through education and participation programs, about the effects of climate change and human impacts on the resilience of the reef.

Support from a number of industry professionals, along with some valued sponsors and several hard-working volunteers all make our current projects possible but, in order to succeed in our mission, we need to do more. As a charitable organisation, donors can make fully tax-deductible gifts to help Reef Check Australia take positive action towards reaching environmentally sound and economically sustainable solutions to the real challenges of coral reef conservation.

Our Mission:

To promote healthy local coral reefs through scientific research, community education and marine conservation.

Objectives:

To ensure a sustainable future for the Australian and Indo-Pacific region's coral reef ecosystems by:

- 1) The generation and publication of select coral reef data that is highly valued by scientists and marine managers.
- 2) The establishment of reef monitoring programs that are accessible to a wide range of the population and yet still produce valuable data.
- 3) The establishment of a coral reef health database for Australia and the Indo-Pacific region that is integrated in to the global Reef Check network.
- 4) For the majority of Australian adults and children to understand the importance of coral reefs and be able to tell you what they can do to help protect them.
- 5) Development and implementation of cutting edge training programs to enhance the value of the data collected by volunteers.
- 6) Quality marine-based education programs for local communities.
- 7) Meaningful participation by local communities in the promotion and maintenance of coral reefs through Reef Check Australia programs or use of the database.
- 8) Promotion of the sustainable use of coral reefs through partnerships with governments, researchers, businesses and community groups.
- 9) Raising public awareness of the economic, ecological and social value of coral reefs.
- 10) Promotion of the Reef Check Australia brand.
- 11) Financial sustainability of Reef Check Australia.

For more information or to get involved check out our website at www.reefcheckaustralia.org.

For further press information and photos please contact Gemma Routledge at Reef Check Australia via email, communications@reefcheckaustralia.org or telephone (07) 4724 3950.