

We all know our coral reefs are in strife and most understand government does not have the necessary resources to fix the problem....but what can we do as individuals to help solve this difficult problem?

Now there is a possible solution - join Reef Check
 Reef Check is an important and crucial step, involving experienced recreational divers, in collecting scientific data on reef health. It is an international environmental organisation active in over 60 countries throughout the tropical world with global headquarters in Los Angeles. Jos Hill heads the Australian branch and is getting the program started by teaching us how to watch and check our own reef systems.

The idea works like this - Reef Check is working toward:

- * Educate the public about the coral reef crisis
- * Create a global network of volunteer teams, which regularly monitor and report on reef health
- * Scientifically investigate coral reef processes
- * Facilitate collaboration among academia, NGOs, governments and the private sector
- * Stimulate local community action to protect remaining pristine reefs and rehabilitate damaged reefs worldwide using ecologically sound and economically sustainable solutions.

Jos Hill is currently training teams of volunteers about the value of coral reefs, their ecology and how to scientifically monitor them. Teams are composed of a diverse range of volunteers ranging from all scientists to recreational divers. Through this process, the teams hope to collect a wealth of valuable data from the Great Barrier Reef the scientists normally couldn't possibly collect themselves under current funding. Imagine the skills you can acquire through the Reef Check training and volunteer work! This new understanding will enable you to take your diver knowledge and skills to another level and will greatly enhance your enjoyment and understanding of diving and the reef environment. To top it all off - you'd be helping save the reef. Not a bad package!

So far this year Reef Check Australia has:

- * Completed 92 surveys on the Great Barrier Reef;
- * Trained marine science students from James Cook University, local and international volunteers in Reef Check;
- * Involved 19 dive operators who have provided free-of-charge berth space to reef check teams of over A\$70,000;
- * Launched the Reef Check Australia Training Program in Townsville. Reef Check Australia's training materials have already been used in the Caribbean and SE Asia
- * Reef Check has attracted media attention throughout Australia and in the UK

Reef Check Australia

By Sue Crowe

How long does the training take?
 The training course runs on week-nights and weekends and is split into 5 components:
 1. Introduction to coral reef ecology and Reef Check methods;
 2. Coral reef substrate and benthos identification;
 3. Mobile invertebrate and coral reef impacts identification;
 4. Fish survey and identification
 5. Video transect methods.



If you live overseas and would like to join the Reef Check Australia team for 2-3 months, Reef Check will be conducting many surveys from Port Douglas to the Whitsundays during March and April 2004.

For more information about Reef Check or to volunteer your services please contact Jos Hill by email: jos.hill@jcu.edu.au or by mobile 0415 446 646 Website: www.ReefCheckAustralia.org

- Current Reef Check Sponsors:**
- Envirofund, Australia through the Low Isles Preservation Society - www.nht.gov.au/envirofund
 - Stage Systems, UK www.stagesystems.co.uk
 - Undersea Explorer www.undersea.com.au
 - Quicksilver Cruises.com
 - Shaolin the Junk - Snorkel tours to Low Isles. Tel: +61 (0) 427 599 518
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 - www.magnetic-island.com.au
 - Fantasea Cruises - www.seethewhitisundays.com/opp/tours/fantasea
 - Hayman Island Resort - dive@hayman.com.au
 - Reef Dive Whitsundays - www.seethewhitisundays.com/opp/tours/rd/drive.html
 - Lady Musgrave Cruises - www.lmcruises.com.au
 - Bargara Beach Dive - www.bargaradive.com

- Reef Check Needs Your Help. They need:
1. Volunteers who are local to Queensland to help monitor the GBR. We will train you to do the surveys. We need experienced divers who have a minimum of a rescue diver qualification (or equivalent) with up to date Senior First Aid and 50+ dives.
 2. Marine ecologist volunteers with experience in coral reef monitoring. We need you to help train and lead local Reef Check teams in Queensland.
 3. Community coordinators to organise Reef Check activities locally. Every team needs a team leader. We are looking for enthusiastic people who enjoy organising.
 4. Berth space on dive boats to get us to our survey sites.
 5. Dive, photographic and computer equipment to facilitate data collection and interpretation activities.
 6. Volunteers with media or PR skills to help us boost our campaign.

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