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## What is your *Reef IQ*? *Reef Check Australia Education Program*

In celebration of International Year of the Reef, Reef Check Australia recently launched the first components of its Education Program *Reef IQ*. The first steps involve running workshops with young people and teachers to attain feedback and raise awareness about the program. The coral reef workshop was held with the support of the Townsville City Council at their Learning Centre located in Garbutt. Thirteen children aged 7-12 years old from 9 different Townsville schools attended the workshop, engaging in activities that ranged from learning about the threats to the Great Barrier Reef, to identifying fruit and vegetables as a lobster!

Ms Roberts, Reef Check Australia Education Officer commented, "The aim of this program is to raise awareness and understanding about coral reef issues, how we use them, how we can impact upon them and how we can manage them in a sustainable manner. Reef Check is about what people can do to contribute to coral reef conservation. Young people are our leaders of tomorrow so Reef Check places a high priority on reaching these important members of society".

The workshops are being held to pilot the Reef Check Australia Education program due for release in schools in Townsville and statewide for the start of the school year in 2009. The ultimate aim for the program is to run it nationally as well as internationally through the International Reef Check network. Reef Check Australia will partner with Townsville City Council and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority's Reef Guardian Program to promote these activities to a wide audience.

The Townsville workshops include fun and educational teachings on coral reefs and focus on issues special to Townsville and the Great Barrier Reef. There are 2 separate courses with the first linking the sustainability of coral reefs to the sustainability of our cities which has been developed in collaboration with Townsville City Council's Creek to Coral Program; and the second teaching kids how to conduct simulated surveys of real reefs in the classroom using actual Reef Check survey methods.

This is a great opportunity for Townsville kids to learn about coral reefs and get involved in helping protect this remarkable living wonder located right on our doorstep!

Ms Hill, Reef Check Australia Managing Director noted "There is enormous enthusiasm for this program. Townsville City Council's Integrated Sustainability Services are very proactive in their support of environmentally sustainable development and along with Envirofund have contributed towards the establishment of our program and materials. However the most remarkable thing about the program is that the majority of its development has been done by our Education Officers who have volunteered their time. Following the initial success of this program we aim to raise funds to enable us to establish a permanent education position at Reef Check".

The first pilot workshop was very well received with one parent commenting "They [the children] really enjoyed it and I think the information really sank in. The girls have been playing 'survey divers' whenever

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they are in or around the pool". It appears the education program is already recruiting volunteer divers for the future!

We are currently planning 2 more workshops to be held on the 29<sup>th</sup> March and 8<sup>th</sup> April. There are still places left on these courses so please contact Jo Roberts at [education@reefcheckaustralia.org](mailto:education@reefcheckaustralia.org) if you wish to reserve a place for your child.

### Reef Check Australia

Coral reefs around the world are under enormous pressure from human activities and climate change. Although Australia's reefs are among the best managed in the world, they are not immune to these threats.

### What do we do?

Reef Check is the United Nations' official community-based coral reef monitoring program that operates in more than 80 countries around the world. The global network of Reef Check volunteers collect valuable information on coral reef health using a scientifically standardised protocol and accredited training program. The information we collect is used by community groups, governments, coral reef managers, universities and businesses to design and implement ecologically sound and economically sustainable coral reef management. The main aims of the global Reef Check network are to educate the public about the value of coral reefs and the crisis facing the world's reefs and to stimulate local action to protect remaining pristine reefs and rehabilitate damaged reefs worldwide.

Reef Check Australia involves the public in coral reef conservation. Our volunteers are recreational scuba divers who monitor the health of reefs around Australia and the Indo-Pacific.

### Our Vision:

Healthy coral reefs and healthy communities.

### Our Mission:

To raise awareness of the value of coral reefs, and empower local communities to participate in the conservation and management of coral reefs in Australia and the Indo-Pacific region.

### Objectives:

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

- 1) Promoting sustainable use of coral reefs through partnerships with governments, researchers, businesses and community groups.
- 2) Raising public awareness of the economic, ecological and social value of coral reefs.
- 3) Identifying simple actions that the general public can take to minimise global threats to coral reefs.
- 4) Developing tools and skills with local community members and volunteers to participate in coral reef health monitoring, conservation and management.
- 5) Establishing a coral reef health database for Australia and the Indo-Pacific that is integrated into the global Reef Check network.

Reef Check Australia is headquartered in Townsville and coordinates Reef Check activities within Australia including the flagship Great Barrier Reef project and local Reef Check Townsville project. For more information or to get involved check out our website at [www.reefcheckaustralia.org](http://www.reefcheckaustralia.org).

For further press information and photos please contact Jo Roberts or Jos Hill at Reef Check Australia via email, [media@reefcheckaustralia.org](mailto:media@reefcheckaustralia.org), or telephone, (07) 4724 3950.