

Media Release: May 2007

Reef Check Australia seeks volunteer divers

Reef Check Australia are calling for expressions of interest from people who would be keen to participate in surveying the health of coral reefs around Mackay and the Whitsundays with the aim of setting up a volunteer team who can monitor reefs in this region on a long-term basis.

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.

Reef Check is the United Nations' official international community-based coral reef monitoring program. Reef Check regional teams monitor the health of their coral reefs by completing scientific surveys of designated dive sites according to the Reef Check protocol. The data is then fed back into the Reef Check Australia database and the global database, and is a major contribution to the global coral reef status report.

As a Reef Check volunteer you will have the opportunity to survey many spectacular dive sites in the region courtesy of dive operators who recognize the benefits of Reef Check monitoring at their sites and support us by donating in-kind berth space to our volunteers to conduct Reef Check surveys. It is also immensely satisfying knowing that you are doing something to protect an environment that you enjoy. Active in over 82 countries, you will become part of the largest coral reef monitoring program in the world and a global network of volunteers.

Reef Check has already successfully established survey teams in Townsville and more recently Cairns, the Gold Coast and the Sunshine Coast but so far has not tried to secure long-term interest in the Whitsundays region. Reef Check is now expanding and would like to set up a project in the Whitsundays region. They are calling for Mackay and Airlie Beach residents who have a keen interest in the marine environment to express their interest in getting involved.

To become a Reef Check volunteer you must complete the Reef Check Australia training course. A course will be held in your area if enough interest is generated. You must be a certified Rescue Diver or above and hold a current first aid and oxygen provider certificate. You must also have completed 50 logged dives and have your own diving equipment.

People interested in participating should check out the short video at www.youtube.com/watch?v=inGov_ipVkk that gives more detail about the global coral reef crisis and volunteering with Reef Check. They can then register their interest by emailing support@reefcheckaustralia.org.

If you do not have the required qualifications but are keen to get involved you can take part in Reef Check's new EcoAction program. In particular, the Underwater Reef Guide, which can be used by divers or snorkellers and contains photographs and information on coral reef fish, invertebrates, corals and algae chosen for their regional abundance as well as their important role in the ecosystem. The attached reusable slate allows you to record what you see and you can submit the data online. These products are sold via local tour operators so have a look out for them next time you are out on the reef. More information about the EcoAction program can be found at www.reefcheckaustralia.org/projects/ecoaction.

Reef Check are also appealing for 1 million signatures to their International Declaration of Reef Rights, which will be presented to the heads of state of the 101 countries with coral reefs in 2008, the International Year of the Reef. With signatures from Australia making up only 2.57% of the total signatures so far it is necessary that more people sign up to demonstrate support

from the country with the largest coral reef system in the world. Sign up at <http://www.reefcheck.org/petition/petition.php>.

Notes to Editors:

For more information please contact Lauren Bird or Roger Beeden on 07 4724 3950 or email media@reefcheckaustralia.org.

Reef Check

Reef Check is a volunteer, non-profit organization set up by coral researchers following a meeting in 1993 where the global coral reef crisis was first discussed. Reef Check has been collecting data since the first International Year of the Reef in 1997 and is now active in over 82 countries and territories world wide. It is Reef Check's mission to:

- educate the public and governments about the value of coral reefs and rocky reef ecosystems and the crisis facing them
- create a global network of volunteer teams, trained and led by scientists, that regularly monitor and report on reef health using a standard method
- facilitate collaborative use of reef health information by community groups, governments, universities and businesses to design and implement ecologically sound and economically sustainable solutions
- stimulate local action to protect remaining pristine reefs and rehabilitate damaged reefs worldwide especially through the creation of Marine Protected Areas.

Reef Check Australia headquarters coordinate the regional teams in Australia and are based in Townsville. www.reefcheckaustralia.org.