



REEF CHECK AUSTRALIA

MEDIA RELEASE

July 24, 2011

Magnetic Island REEFSearch

Think reef studies are just for scientists? Think again!

On Sunday, July 24 residents and visitors on Magnetic Island had the chance to dive into REEFSearch with Reef Check Australia and the Best Expedition in the World. The pilot REEFSearch community engagement program aims to help any snorkeler or diver identify key Reef Check reef health indicators and record what they find using a simple underwater dive slate. Reef Check and event partners invited people to hop in for a snorkel at Alma Bay to try-out the new program and provide feedback to help fine-tune the new initiative.

REEFSearch aims to increase awareness of reefs and reef health issues by getting people out to see the reef and record what they find. The underwater slates have been designed by Reef Check Scientists to highlight some of the same things trained Reef Check volunteers monitor on annual reef health surveys around the world.

The weekend event was part of the Best Expedition in the World, who is supporting Reef Check's work throughout the four month journey along the length of the Great Barrier Reef. Ben Southall, Queensland Tourism ambassador and intrepid adventurer leading the Best Expedition in the World says, *"The work that Reef Check carries out helps us to understand how we can preserve the future of this highly sensitive eco-system for generations to come and working with them on the Best Expedition in the World is a chance to help with the health of the Great Barrier Reef."*

Reef Check Australia's General Manager, Jennifer Loder says *"Reef Check has been monitoring reef health around Magnetic Island with our teams of trained volunteers since 2003. The REEFSearch program is a great tool to inspire even more people to get involved in better understanding, appreciating and looking after reefs. We're thrilled that so many people came together to support this event."*

This project was supported by the Townsville City Council's Community Grant Program.

The following partners provided in-kind support for the REEFSearch pilot program on Magnetic Island:

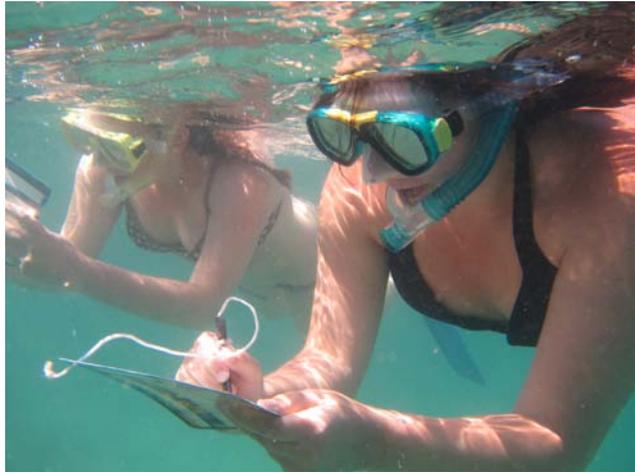


For additional information and images, please contact:

Jennifer Loder, Reef Check Australia General Manager via jenn@reefcheckaustralia.org or 0402284681

Visit <http://www.reefcheckaustralia.org/reefsearch.html> for current updates on project outcomes.

REEFSearch event images



Reef Check Australia

What do we do?

Reef Check Australia is an award-winning, not-for-profit environmental organisation that engages the Australian community in hands-on reef monitoring, management and conservation. We believe in protecting reefs and oceans by empowering people.

How do we empower volunteers?

Our teams of trained volunteer divers are part of a worldwide network of volunteers who regularly monitor and report on reef health in more than 90 countries. Each project uses the same standardised Reef Check scientific survey method and basic indicators, helping to both monitor reefs on a local scale and compare reef health on a global scale. Reef Check Australia has been monitoring the Great Barrier Reef since 2001 and extended to monitor rocky reefs in South East Queensland in 2007.

Reef Check monitoring

Reef Check surveys collect data about substrate cover, key indicator invertebrates, reef health impacts and fish abundance. By visiting each research site annually, we are able to record what is happening on that reef at a specific point in time. **The long-term data set acts as an early detection system for changes in the health of reef habitats.**

Why Reef Check?

Reef Check programs promote community education, collect useful reef research and facilitate better conservation of reef resources... all through the power of volunteers and community partnerships. We work with leading marine research organisations, tourism operations, universities, government agencies and community organisations to create innovative collaborations and sound data applications. The information collected by Reef Check volunteers is used to design and implement ecologically sound and economically sustainable reef management.

Reef Check database

All data is stored in the Reef Check Australia Reef Health Database. This resource is freely available to anyone who wants to learn more about our Queensland monitoring locations, simply by using the Google maps interface to review summary data for each site. Raw data is available to researchers and managers interested in more information.

More than monitoring

In addition to our long-term reef health data sets, Reef Check Australia is working on other opportunities for more community members to get involved.

- Our education program for children, Reef IQ, includes course materials, workshops and fun activities using coral reefs as a vehicle to encourage sustainable practices and hands-on science programs for young people.
- Collaborative underwater clean ups with dive shops, university groups and management agencies remove marine debris from reef sites.
- The new online public database for Grey Nurse Shark Watch, a community photographic identification monitoring program will be hosted by RCA, helping to provide more opportunities for divers and fishers to get involved.
- Sustainable behaviour products, reminders and ideas available on our website to encourage people to help protect reefs on a daily basis.

Support Reef Check

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. **We are actively seeking corporate support for our Adopt a Reef program to implement the ReefSearch program.**