

# Reef Check

## Mission and Purpose

### Mission

Reef Check (RC), founded in 1997, is a global volunteer effort by teams of recreational divers and marine scientists. RC was started to address a number of problems facing coral reefs, including over-fishing, habitat destruction, and tourism pressure. RC has three major goals. The first goal is to increase public awareness about the value of coral reefs, threats to coral health, and solutions to these problems by involving local communities in monitoring and managing reefs. The second is to collect a scientifically accurate and globally comparable dataset that allows us to track important trends in coral reef health. The third goal is to provide local reef managers with the tools and resources necessary to manage their reefs at a community level. To achieve such goals, RC supports a number of programs throughout the world.

### Programs

Reef Check's (RC) program is based on a monitoring technique that is used by volunteer teams on a global basis. RC provides support for these teams through annual regional trainings, seed funding, and logistical support. All data generated by teams are analyzed at RC headquarters and included in an annual report. This report is used to track global trends and is currently included as part of the "Status of the World's Coral Reefs", a report generated, in part, by the United Nations.

## Results

### Accomplishments

1. Received recognition from the United States Coral Reef Task Force for successful creation and implementation of a community-based coral reef monitoring program.
2. Reef Check has been selected to be the "community-based" survey program for the United Nations' Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network.
3. Reef Check has expanded to include teams in 40 countries and through monitoring, has documented an unprecedented global bleaching and mortality event.

### Objectives for Year Beginning 01/02/2002

1. Reef Check will continue to expand to include additional volunteers.
2. RC will generate and publish a five-year report of coral reef health.
3. Reef Check will increase its membership both in the United States and worldwide.

### Self Assessment

The Reef Check monitoring technique is evaluated by scientific review and volunteer feedback.

## **Background**

The Reef Check program was founded in 1997 by Dr. Gregor Hodgson to answer the question: "What is the health of the world's reefs?" To do this on a global scale, a simple, rapid monitoring program was designed that relies on volunteers, trained and led by marine scientists. The Reef Check concept is to create an international network of regional, national and local volunteer coordinators who are responsible for Reef Check activities in their area. The coordinators raise funds, organize media events and match teams of divers with marine scientists who provide training and lead the teams during the actual survey.

Today, Reef Check surveys have been carried out at over 1000 reefs in 50 countries and territories. By using the same method all over the world, we have been able to track global trends such as the global extent of overfishing on reefs and the 1998 bleaching and mortality event that devastated reefs throughout the tropical oceans.

## **Origins**

Reef Check origins can be traced back to the 1993 Colloquium on Global Aspects of Coral Reefs, organized by Prof. Robert Ginsburg of the University of Miami. This meeting was organized to discuss the status of the world's reefs and included many of the world's coral reef scientists. At the end of the meeting, it was clear that it was impossible answer the question the group had gathered to ask. There was simply not enough information to form a picture of the status of the world's reefs.

Some of the reef scientists felt that part of the problem lay with some of the standard monitoring methods scientists have used. These detailed methods were designed to investigate community ecology and include measurements of many parameters, which may not be affected when coral reef health is damaged. The scientists agreed that more specific methods should be designed to investigate human impacts on coral reefs because such impacts are preventable.

Another problem with the traditional scientific approach discussed was that there are only a small number of reef scientists, most of who are very busy. Subsequently, surveys are only completed periodically and any databases used to track and check the health of coral reefs was very spotty and not easily comparable.

The solution would be to organize a global survey effort that would take place annually over a defined period - a synoptic survey of the health of the world's reefs, with volunteer help from non-scientists. The Reef Check concept grew out of this initiative and was developed throughout early 1996, and the name "Reef Check" was chosen in Hong Kong by Gregor Hodgson and Shaun Waddell on 22 July, 1996.

In 1997, Reef Check teams completed the first global survey of coral reefs. Over 750 volunteer sport divers were trained and led by 100 volunteer scientists in surveys of more than 300 reefs in 31 countries. The results of Reef Check 97 provided the first solid evidence that coral reefs have been damaged on a global scale.

In addition to producing valuable scientific results, Reef Check 97 raised the awareness of scientists, governments, politicians and the general public about

the value of coral reefs, threats to their health and solutions to coral reef problems. This message was spread worldwide by TV coverage including CNN and BBC, and by major newspapers and magazines in a dozen languages.

Reef Check has been selected to be the "community-based" survey program for the United Nations' Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network. Reef Check helps local community members learn how to monitor their coral reefs, providing the information needed so that they can be managed in a sustainable manner. Participation in Reef Check is one of the best methods of changing people's behavior and slowing the damage so that reefs can recover.