

REEF CHECK AUSTRALIA

Snorkel-Dive Policy & Procedures



Reef Check Foundation Ltd

www.reefcheckaustralia.org

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1. Overview

Reef Check Australia (RCA) snorkel diving activities are activities performed for the purpose of community-based, natural resource monitoring activities.

The purpose of this document is to provide the standard requirements for snorkel-diving activities performed under the auspices of RCA. It should be read carefully by every RCA snorkel-diving activity participant, as there are responsibilities placed upon participants to ensure that they snorkel-dive safely.

The contents of this policy apply to all people who carry out snorkel-diving activities under the auspices of Reef Check Australia. This includes people who take part in; a recognised Reef Check Australia programme of training, a recognised Reef Check Australia survey activity and collaboration activities with outside agencies.

Reef Check Australia is committed to a high standard of Work Place Health and Safety. The safety of RCA volunteers and employees is our number one priority.

2. Snorkel Diver Requirements

Snorkel-divers must be reasonable swimmers and observe common sense rules regarding boating and swimming safety. Inexperienced snorkelers must undertake a snorkel-diving familiarisation course and should practice in either a swimming pool, or other sheltered, shallow waters, until they attain sufficient confidence to snorkel in deeper water or diverse environmental conditions.

RCA reserves the right to assess any snorkel diver's Snorkel-Diving Skills. A formal Snorkel-Diving Skill Evaluation may comprise, but is not limited to, the activities listed below.

Snorkel-Diving Skill Evaluation

- a. Swim 300 metres in mask, fins and snorkel. There is no time limit for this, and you may use any swimming strokes you want.
- b. Float and tread water for 10 minutes, again using any methods that you want.
- c. Perform an inert diver tow. i.e. in less than 3 minutes, tow or push another diver a distance of 100 metres, with both divers wearing snorkel equipment;
- d. Demonstrate mask clearing;
- e. Demonstrate two methods of snorkel clearing;
- f. Demonstrate Duck diving methods

2.1 General Requirements

All Reef Check Australia Snorkel-Divers must:

- a. Complete a Snorkel Registration Form, a Snorkel-dive Agreement and a RCA Liability Waiver;
- b. Familiarise themselves with the Reef Check Australia Snorkel-Diving Policy & Procedures Manual;
- c. Maintain a high level of knowledge and competence with regard to the type/s of snorkel-diving they undertake, as well as knowledge of the equipment in use;
- d. Maintain a level of physical fitness appropriate for the snorkel-dive activities;
- e. Actively participate in activity Hazard Identification and Risk Assessments;
- f. Know their limits and feel comfortable conveying any concerns about activities.

2.2 Snorkel Surveyor Course Participants

Reef Check Australia Snorkel Surveyor Course Participants may only participate during in-water Reef Check Australia snorkel-dive activities, if they are supervised by a Reef Check Trainer.

Requirements for Snorkel Surveyor Course Participants:

- Comply with Reef Check Australia general requirements (Section 2.1)
- Have attained the age of 10 years old prior to the commencement date of the Snorkel Surveyor Course;
- Formally enrolled in the Reef Check Australia Training Course ;
- Have been advised, and understand, that some medical conditions and physical exertion can increase his/her risk of injury or death;
- Have a working familiarity with the RCA Snorkel Diving Policy and Procedures Manual;
- Are supervised by a Team Leader or Reef Check Trainer, who is present and in sight of the diver at all times while they are in the water;
- May be required to complete a Snorkel-Diving Skill Evaluation at the discretion of Reef Check Australia staff;
- May be required to undertake a medical evaluation at the discretion of Reef Check Australia staff.

2.3 Snorkel Surveyor

Reef Check Australia Snorkel Surveyors may only conduct in-water Reef Check Australia snorkel dive activities, if they are supervised by a Team Leader.

Requirements for Snorkel Surveyor:

- Comply with Reef Check Australia general requirements (Section 2.1);
- Have successfully completed the Reef Check Australia Training Course;
- Have attained the age of 18 years old prior to the date of the Reef Check Australia snorkel dive survey activities;
- Have been advised, and understand, that some medical conditions and physical exertion can increase his/her risk of injury or death;
- Have a working familiarity with the Snorkel-Diving Policy and Procedures Manual;
- Are supervised by a Team Leader or Reef Check Instructor, who is present and in sight of the diver at all times while they are in the water;
- May be required to complete a Snorkel-Diving Skill Evaluation at the discretion of Reef Check Australia staff;
- May be required to undertake a medical evaluation at the discretion of Reef Check Australia staff.

2.4 Team Leader

The Team Leader is responsible for the supervision of snorkel surveyors during Reef Check survey activities. The Team Leader is also responsible for the management of all documentation associated with these Reef Check Survey activities.

Requirements for Team Leader:

- Successfully completed the Reef Check Australia Training Course & Reef Check Australia Team Leader Training
- Is compliant with the Reef Check Australia general requirements (Section 2.1)
- Have a working familiarity with the Snorkel-Diving Policy and Procedures Manual;
- A current and insured PADI DM or Instructor (or equivalent);
- Must have logged proof of recent diving experience;
- Current Certificate of Medical Fitness to Dive (AS2299);
- Current First Aid, Oxygen Provider and CPR certifications

2.5 Reef Check Trainer

The Reef Check Trainer is responsible for leading RCA Training Programs.

Criteria:

- Completed the Reef Check Australia Training Course, Instructor for PADI Reef Health Surveyor Course
- PADI Open Water SCUBA Instructor
- Current Instructor liability insurance and PADI Professional Membership
- Agree to Reef Check Australia general requirements (Section 2.1)
- Have a working familiarity with the Snorkel-Diving Policy and Procedures Manual;
- Must have logged proof of 50 dives and recent diving experience (at least four dives logged in the past 12 months, or at least 6 dives logged in the past 18 months including at least one dive in the past 6 months)
- Current Certificate of Medical Fitness to Dive (AS2299)
- Current First Aid, Oxygen Provider and CPR certifications
- Marine Biology tertiary training, preferably to Masters level and proven experience with coral reef monitoring (although not required).

3. Fitness Requirements

Currently, there are no specific medical certificates required to undertake snorkelling activities. RCA Snorkel Surveyor Course Participants and RCA Snorkel Surveyors shall complete a self-assessment medical questionnaire within their Snorkel Register Application.

RCA Survey Snorkelers involved in snorkel-diving activities shall ensure they are fit to dive and are advised that;

(a) snorkel-diving can be a strenuous physical activity and may increase the health and safety risks for persons suffering from;

- (i) any medical condition that may be made worse by physical exertion, for example, heart disease, asthma and some lung complaints; or
- (ii) any medical condition that can result in loss of consciousness, for example, some forms of epilepsy and some diabetic conditions; or
- (iii) asthma that can be brought on by cold water or salt water mist; and

(b) the person shall tell the Reef Check Team Leader or Reef Check Trainer and their snorkelling buddy(s) and surface watch, if the person has any concerns about a medical condition.

It is the responsibility of the RCA Snorkel Surveyor, involved in snorkel-diving activities, to ensure they are fit to snorkel-dive. Fitness should be maintained by regular exercise, a suitable diet and general wellbeing. Snorkel-divers must not snorkel-dive if they feel unwell or do not believe that their level of fitness or mental preparedness is adequate to perform the tasks assigned. Any noticeable variation in normal feeling of health and fitness should be immediately reported to the snorkelling supervisor and to a medical practitioner if the variation persists.

If a member of the dive team feels that for any other reason diving would be unsafe, then that person must convey their concerns to the Team Leader.

Members of a snorkel-dive team must not be pressured or cajoled into diving if they choose, for any reason, not to dive. Team members may choose to safely abort the survey at any time.

4. Snorkel-dive Planning

Before conducting any snorkel diving operations under the auspices of RCA, the Team Leader or Reef Check Trainer must formulate and submit a snorkel-dive plan which should include the following:

- Divers' names, duties and snorkel-dive experience details;
- Location(s) of proposed dives;
- Estimated depth(s) and duration(s) anticipated;
- Proposed work, equipment, and boats to be employed;
- Any hazardous conditions anticipated;
- A risk and hazard assessment and an emergency response plan (completed separately for each dive location)

4.1 Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment

An important phase of dive planning is a conducting a Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment. It is the responsibility of the Team Leader to ensure, as far as practicable, that snorkel-diving hazards are identified for staff, trainees and volunteers. Following an assessment of the risks involved in a particular diving operation and study site area, the Team Leader must ensure that suitable measures to control risks are determined and implemented. It is the Team Leader's responsibility for implementing the field control measures and ensuring they are capable of being met.

The Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment form is to be attached to the Dive Plan and must be available in the field at all times.

4.2 Emergency Response Plan

In the event of an emergency it is essential to immediately assist the injured person. To assist with this the Team Leader should ensure that an emergency response plan exists and is up to date for their area of operation.

5. Equipment

Snorkel-diving equipment shall comply with the relevant minimum requirements as detailed below. Prior to entering the water it is the responsibility of individual divers to check that the equipment they are using is in good working order. Never use faulty equipment.

Minimum Equipment Requirements: Each snorkel-diver shall be equipped with the following:

- Face mask and snorkel (attachable or attached to mask);
- Wetsuit (to offer appropriate exposure protection and positive buoyancy);
- Fins.

Additional equipment may include the following items (based on risk assessment outcomes):

- Depth Gauge;
- Visual and auditory signalling device (i.e. safety sausage, dive whistle);
- Divers knife;
- Diver's watch or elapsed-time indicator.

6. Snorkel-dive Procedures

6.1 Snorkel Dive Guidelines

Reef Check Australia has put into place the following restrictions to ensure the safety of snorkel-divers:

- Reef Check snorkel surveys should be conducted with regard to Reef Check Australia snorkel diving policies and procedures.
- No RCA surveys will be conducted at night; any snorkel dive should be finished before dusk.
- RCA does not allow solo diving; all divers are to dive in dive buddy pairs and with the team.
- RCA does not allow the use of any underwater tools other than those which the diver has been trained to use in the Reef Check Training Course.
- Snorkel divers should not dive deeper than 5m and all snorkel divers should dive within their fitness, experience and training levels.
- Snorkel-divers may at any time choose to safely abort the activity if they do not feel fit to continue with snorkel-dive activities.
- Snorkel-divers must wear a positively buoyant exposure suit.

6.2 Supervision of Snorkel-Dive Activities

For every snorkel-dive there shall be a designated Team Leader. The Team Leader is responsible for ensuring that all snorkel-dive teams operate within RCA's Snorkel-Dive Policy.

The Team Leader is responsible for:

- Verification that all snorkel-divers are sufficiently trained and experienced to perform their allocated tasks safely;
- Ensuring that each snorkel-dive is performed in accordance with a predetermined snorkel-dive plan;
- Briefing the snorkel-dive team members on objectives;
- Identify hazards with the potential to affect the safety of the snorkel-divers and/or the snorkel site;
- Assessing risks associated with any identified hazards;
- Discussing control measures with the snorkel-dive team and any other person responsible for the site if hazard factors are identified which carry unacceptable risk levels;
- Implementation of control measures necessitated by the hazard identification and risk assessment process;
- Restricting or suspending any operation considered unsafe;
- Administration of all records and other documentation related to the snorkelling operations.

Reef Check snorkel activities use a standardized risk assessment to take into consideration environmental conditions, task-related hazards, physiological factors, associated activity factors and other hazards. The RCA risk assessment must be reviewed by the Team Leader before choosing to snorkel-dive at a particular location. Please note that it is the responsibility of all team members to actively participate in the risk assessment and verify that they feel comfortable to snorkel-dive. If snorkel-diving activities are acceptable, then the Team Leader must deliver a safety briefing to snorkel-divers.

6.3 Safety Briefing

Before each snorkel dive the RCA Team Leader shall deliver a briefing outlining safety considerations and snorkel-dive objectives. When on a commercial vessel, divers will also receive a boat briefing by relevant boat crew outlining safety specifications for the vessel. The crew may also deliver a dive specific briefing in addition to the briefing delivered by the RCA Team Leader.

Reef Check teams shall listen to, and comply with, all instructions delivered within each briefing. The Team Supervisor must remind snorkel-divers to snorkel-dive safely and comply with the instructions they are given by the boat crew as well as the Reef Check Team Leader. This includes:

- Location and roles of Supervisory staff, e.g., dive instructors, dive Supervisors, and surface watch;
- Implementation of control measures necessitated by the hazard identification and risk assessment process;
- Emergency procedures, such as recall, distress and rescue procedures, and the use of signalling devices;
- Lost contact procedure (buddy or team) ;
- Emergency action plan;
- Dive objectives;
- Allocated tasks for each team member;
- Methodology and equipment to be employed;

If a diver does not feel capable of a dive at any time they should notify the Team Leader. If environmental conditions are not ideal for a survey, the Team Leader (or any diver of the team who does not feel capable) may choose to abort the survey.

After delivering the snorkel-dive safety briefing and addressing any questions, Each team member shall sign, verifying they understand the dive objectives, their role(s), hazards, hazard management and methods/equipment used. This must be completed before each snorkel-dive.

6.4 Surface Watch

A surface watch is mandatory for Reef Check snorkel-dives. This may be a member of the boat crew on a commercial vessel or another specifically appointed person. The surface watch must:

- Be positioned out of the water where the lookout can see the whole area where snorkel diving is taking place;
- Be solely engaged in being the lookout;
- Be responsible for completing the Snorkel Dive Log ;
- Be able to recognise relevant hazards and divers in difficulty;
- Be able to either:
 - Rescue a diver (demonstrated through proof of Rescue Diver certification); or
 - Direct a person who is immediately available and capable of rescuing a diver;
- Be able to either:
 - Provide first aid including expired air resuscitation, oxygen resuscitation and external cardiac compression; or
 - Direct a person who is immediately available and capable of providing such first aid;
- Have a means of communication with an emergency team, e.g., phone or radio.
- Be familiar with, and capable of activating, the Emergency Response Plan.

6.5 Dive Flags

Dive Flags are required for all RCA snorkel-diving activities. Additional dive flags may be used in areas where boat traffic is likely.

6.6 Head Counts

Snorkel-dive participants must sign the Snorkel Log Form as soon as practicable upon exiting the water. This verifies that they are back on board the boat or back to shore. Failure to sign the Snorkel Log Form may result in activation of the Emergency Response Plan and the deployment of search and rescue snorkel-divers.

7. RCA Snorkel Diver's Responsibilities

7.1 Pro-active Safety

Each snorkel-diver has a responsibility to responsible for ensuring their safety and the safety of other team members. The following are essential safety considerations for each snorkel-diver:

- Abiding by the RCA Snorkel-Dive Policy and decisions made by the Team Leader concerning particular diving operations.
- Ensuring that they are medically, physically, and mentally fit for the expected tasks and demands of the snorkel locations.
- Knowing the limits of their capabilities - If a snorkel-diver is uncertain about their ability to safely undertake any proposed task they must notify the Team Leader immediately.
- Notifying the Team Leader as soon as possible of any injury that occurs to him/her or to his/her buddy snorkel diver.
- Actively participating in the Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment process.
- Asking questions if they are unsure about an activity or their role within the activity.

7.2 Buddy Distance

All Reef Check snorkel divers are required to dive in buddy pairs of two or three, and to remain in a group as a team throughout the snorkel-dive. The following are distances for snorkel-diving procedure:

- A buddy pair should remain as close together as necessary in order to be able to immediately offer assistance to their buddy if required;
- A buddy pair should remain as close together as necessary in order to be able to effectively communicate;
- Each buddy pair should remain in sight of the Team Leader.