Reef Check Australia’s REEFSearch Pilot Program

Progress Summary from May – September 2011
REEFSearch is a new community-based reef identification & observation program with a self-guided underwater slate that anyone can use.
REEFSearch helps more people take an active role in reef health monitoring, awareness and action.
REEFSearch is a simplified version of the globally standardized reef health surveys conducted by our trained volunteers.
REEFSearch underwater slate & pilot were made possible by in-kind support from local businesses.
Why did participants want to REEFSearch?

“I like snorkelling, helping, caring for the reef”

“GBR is important, I want to contribute”

“I was interested in promoting reef health and protection”

“To help research on the reef”

“It makes you appreciate the reef more, made the experience more exciting”

“The more reef we keep, the more we can enjoy it”

“To help & to enjoy”

“It makes you look at the reef in a different way”

“I enjoyed referencing the slate to see what each thing was”
We have been asking diverse audiences to try out REEFSearch and provide feedback & suggestions during the trial period.
Reef Check launched the first ever REEFSearch on Lady Elliot Island with Tourism Queensland's Best Expedition in the World.
We trialled REEFSearch with 22 students, resort guests and staff.
Feedback from participants showed an average 15% increase in self-reported reef knowledge after using REEFSearch.
Everyone agreed that “Information gathered by people using the REEFSearch slate is important ... and should be shared on the internet.”
Most people agreed that “People who use the REEFSearch slate will become more aware of the need to conserve coral reefs.”
Overall, rave reviews and some excellent suggestions to make REEFSearch even better for full program implementation.
The REEFSearch launch story made it on Channel 10 news.
Plus, there were plenty of great adventures & photos opps!
Since the launch, we have continued to pilot REEFSearch, collecting community feedback for further analysis & recommendations.
The University of Queensland UniDive Club tried the slates while diving & snorkelling and provided more positive reactions & helpful feedback.
We also had Reef Check volunteers test out the new REEFSearch program to see how it compared. Verdict? Easy to use but still a fun challenge.
50 participants came out to try REEFSearch in a Magnetic Island event supported by Townsville City Council and local tourism businesses.
Participants were supportive of the quick & easy introduction to Queensland’s reefs and the chance to help protect them.
Year 9 & 10 students at Bwgcolman Community School on Palm Island gave the REEFSearch slates a test run in local Pencil Bay.
Their teacher said “It enables students to better understand their local environment and the ways in which they can help protect it.”
“I had the best time at the Pencil Bay when we went snorkelling and checking out the corals and telling what kind we need to save. I would like to go again, but if we can try to go some where else away from the sting rays. Thanks for the trip.” –Neil, Student
University of Queensland Geography students tried out REEFSearch slates for a GIS mapping exercise to collect data about invertebrates and reef impacts.
Oceanic Dive & Ecotourism Expo attendees provided additional feedback from the industry perspective.
REEFSearch has now gone global, with trials in Fiji as part of a University of the Sunshine Coast eco-tourism project.
The REEFSearch pilot program will be ongoing until December 2011.
We’re still collecting & analysing community feedback about REEFSearch to ensure it’s success & sustainability.
We’re just getting started.
Help make REEFSearch a reality.
Find out more at: www.reefcheckaustralia.org
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