

April 27, 2009
Monday

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LOCAL News

Divers, students make difference for coral reefs



Divers and students who joined the global effort.



LEFT & RIGHT: Underwater photos of the dive. - COURTESY SCUBA TECH INTERNATIONAL

Having existed for more than 500 million years and known as the 'rainforests of the sea', coral reefs are not only breathtakingly beautiful, but are also extremely important in maintaining the ocean's biological diversity. Due to human activity, however, these brilliant 'undersea gardens' are now under threat.

Coral reefs are at risk everyday from global warming, pollution, marine debris and almost any human alteration of the environment. If these trends continue, and with 30 per cent of the world's coral reefs already dead, it is estimated we may lose them completely within the next 30-50 years, a press release from Scuba Tech International, Empire Hotel said.

Yesterday, volunteer divers from Scuba Tech International and students and faculty from the International School of Brunei (ISB) joined a global effort to make a difference every time they dive.

Fourteen divers and students set out from The Empire Hotel at 10am to make the slack high tide forecast for 11am. Upon arriving at Hornets Reef located some 15 km offshore, Fraser McDermott, Operations Manager and resident PADI Master Scuba Diver Trainer, briefed the students and divers on clear indications of data collection procedures, how to protect the reef whilst collecting data and safety protocols.

This was the day all the hard work of those involved came to fruition. The whole process began in February 2009 with 20 students beginning their PADI Open Water Diver training followed by the Project AWARE Coral Reef Conservation Specialty Training.

Said Debbie Canterford, ISB Coordinator, who helped plan this project: "It's so great to see the children making a difference both under the oceans and on land, this project adds a whole new dimension to the environmental efforts of ISB after the success of our Million Trees Project." The data from yesterday's dives are already available for viewing on the CoralWatch website at www.coralwatch.org

Scuba Tech International, in partnership with Project AWARE and CoralWatch, has brought this simple, non-invasive method of monitoring coral reefs to divers who are passionate enough to make a difference. CoralWatch monitoring charts have a series of colours representing different coral bleaching and recovery stages. Volunteer divers match the colour of the coral with the colour on the chart and track this information over time.

Scientists will use the data collected to help answer questions about coral bleaching, recovery patterns and how long bleaching events last. Volunteers will track the health

of Hornets Reef over time and compare those with reefs in other regions.

Divers, snorkellers, their families and friends can help make a difference for local reefs by calling Scuba Tech International at 2611381 or by visiting www.divebrunei.com. Monitoring dives have been planned every second Sunday for the foreseeable future. For more information about Project AWARE conservation initiatives visit www.projectaware.org.

Project AWARE Foundation is a non-profit environmental organisation working in partnership with divers and water enthusiasts to conserve underwater environments through education, advocacy and action.

CoralWatch is a non-profit research organisation from the University of Queensland in Brisbane, Australia and is composed of leading coral biologists aiming to establish global coral reef health monitoring programmes and raise public awareness regarding global warming.



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