

Citizen Science Initiative



An Engaged Community

Committed community members who are mostly volunteers have been gathering data about the health of the Great Barrier Reef and the species that live there including fish, corals and seagrass for many years. These 'citizen science' groups come from diverse backgrounds, including members of the general public, dive enthusiasts, tourism operators and Reef managers, spread along the 2300kms of the coastline bordering the Reef.

From a community perspective, citizen science programs build strong links with local residents and provide volunteers with a hands-on opportunity to contribute to knowledge about the health of the Reef. High quality community information can also greatly assist Reef managers and researchers as they make decisions about the best ways to preserve the Reef.

The eReefs project, in which the Great Barrier Reef Foundation is a partner (see separate fact sheet), is designed to provide the most comprehensive picture of the Reef – as it is, has been and will be – to managers policy makers, government agencies, researchers, industry and community. The engagement of the community (from tourists to fishers to councils and schools) in the evolution of this comprehensive Reef picture through citizen science initiatives has the potential to enhance economic, social and

environmental outcomes for the Reef and Reef communities.

Step 1: Scoping Study

To begin this journey, the Great Barrier Reef Foundation commissioned a scoping study, in 2012, to better understand citizen science on the Reef – its scope, scale, opportunities and limitations.

The study profiled the many and varied groups undertaking citizen science activities and the high level of commitment from those involved. It further identified that support for coordination, collaboration and communication, together with some technological assistance with data and tools, has the potential to greatly enhance both community and Reef outcomes.

Step 2: Phase 1 Citizen Science Initiative

The citizen science initiative vision is for a coordinated approach to citizen science across the Great Barrier Reef. It will focus on enhancing the data collection, data integration, communication and education aspects for a number of existing citizen science programs, run by reef management, tourism operators, researchers and dive enthusiasts. These programs (e.g. Reef Guardian, Eye on the Reef, Reef Check, Seagrass & Mangrove Watch and Coral Watch) reach wide audience including local government (Regional Councils), Reef managers,



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Indigenous communities, commercial fishers, farmers, tourism operators, tourists, diving enthusiasts, schools & school students, Reef researchers and research institutions.

Building on existing efforts and encouraging greater community involvement in citizen science on the Great Barrier Reef, the project will focus on raising awareness about citizen science, broadening participation, enabling collaboration and sharing of data and providing visual tools for participants and the community to view that both educate and inspire, such as maps that show the latest information gathered about coral health.

Example Citizen Science groups on the Great Barrier Reef

The following citizen science groups represent a partial list of those collecting information in the community:

- **Infofish Services:**
www.info-fish.net
- **Seagrass Watch:**
www.seagrasswatch.org
- **Mangrove Watch:**
www.mangrovewatch.org.au
- **Coral Watch:**
www.coralwatch.org
- **ReefCheck Australia:**
www.reefcheckaustralia.org
- **BirdLife Australia:**
www.birdlife.org.au
- **Queensland Turtle Research Program Project manta:**
www.uq.edu.au/ecology/project-manta
- **Australian Marine Debris Initiative:**
www.tangaroablue.org/amdi/amdi-program.html



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