

# GREEN FINS Newsletter

Volume 2 Issue 3

### We are Green Fins

By: Kate Hutchison

Green Fins Program Expands to Six Countries and Certifies 289 Dive Centres to Protect Coral Reefs and Promote Environmentally Friendly\_Dive Practices in South East Asia

65 percent of Green Fins certified dive centres in the diving destination of Puerto Galera in Philippines found to have significantly decreased the environmental impact of diving on the reefs after just one year in the program

**PHUKET, THAILAND** – **1 July 2014:** Green Fins, the conservation program dedicated to protecting and preserving coral reefs and marine environments worldwide, today announced that it will expand into Vietnam and the Maldives in addition to its active operations in Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines and Thailand. To date, the program has certified 289 dive centres in South East Asia.

The Green Fins program was developed in 2004 in response to the rapid expansion of coral reef recreation, particularly scuba diving, in the last few decades. Scuba diving is amongst the fastest growing recreational activity in the world, with an estimated 1 million new recruits being trained every year. There have been growing concerns within the scientific community about the environmental impacts associated with snorkelling and scuba diving practices. Significant damage can result from divers holding, touching and standing on reefs particularly dive novices and trainees - and dive boat anchors and chains can dislodge, break and pulverise live coral. The need for educating dive operators on basic marine ecology and eco-friendly diving behaviours that reduce environmental pressures from tourists has scuba diving industry.



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The Green Fins program trains dive operators on best practices when snorkelling and scuba diving to minimize the impact on the coral reef ecosystem. These "Environmentally Friendly Dive Practices" are standards that dive centres must adhere to and brief their customers on to obtain certification in the Green Fins program. Guides and instructors gain knowledge and learn best practices that promote minimum discharge of waste from their boats, for example, and the importance of friendly diving and snorkelling behaviours. Dive operators are also required to complete a Reef Watch survey each year to record the health of the coral reefs on which they dive, measuring the density of live corals and the abundance of fishes and a variety of other marine organisms. Reef Watch surveys are recorded in a database maintained by Green Fins program network. In addition, Green Fins coordinators conduct an annual assessment of certified dive shops to ensure they are following the standard practices and members may lose certification if their assessment scores show no sign of improvement after two years.

"Whilst there are a number of guidelines to help individual divers reduce their impact on the reef, before Green Fins there were no internationally recognised environmental standards for diving related tourism activities or practical management systems to help business owners to implement these guidelines," said Chloe Hunt, manager of The Reef-World Foundation and Green Fins. "The\_Environmentally Friendly Dive Practices explain the basic do's and don'ts that divers should practice to ensure we protect our reefs."

Greens Fins is not only good for maintaining healthy, living coral reefs, it's also good for dive operators' businesses. As general awareness increases about the fragility of coral reefs and the widespread damage occurring from coral bleaching (increasing water temperatures caused by both natural and man-made incidents, often killing off corals), responsible consumers are opting to do business with dive shops that promote "green" practices andminimize the impact of human interaction on coral reefs.

"In 2010, operators at our dive centre were trained on the Green Fins conservation practices and we proudly promote our participation in the program in all of our advertising materials," said Tony Wadie, Chief Operating Officer of Scuba Adventures, Khao Lak, Thailand. "Increasingly we are making more snorkelers and divers aware of the fragility of coral reef environments and we're enlisting them to help protect and preserve reefs for future generations to enjoy. Our customers applaud our efforts to promote sustainable tourism practices and our participation in Green Fins has had a positive impact on our business."

Green Fins is an initiative of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and was developed for implementation by the UK registered charity, The Reef-World Foundation (Reef-World) and the Phuket Marine Biological Centre, Department of Marine and Coastal Resources (PMBC-DMCR) and many individuals from the diving community in Thailandbetween 2004 to 2009. The results show the program is working now across the whole region. In a recent study published in the journal of Ocean and Coastal Management<sup>1</sup> 65 percent of Green Fins certified dive centres in Puerto Galera in the Philippines have significantly reduced their environmental impact by adhering to the Green Fins practices after only one year.

#### **About Green Fins**

Green Fins is a conservation program supportedby the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and managed bythe Phuket Marine Biological Centre, Department of Marine and Coastal Resources (PMBC-DMCR) in Thailand and internationally by The Reef-World Foundation (Reef-World). Green Fins' mission is to protect and conserve coral reefs by establishing and implementing *Environmentally Friendly Dive Practices*to promote a sustainable diving tourism industry. By enlisting the active participation of dive operators and educating them on the environmental risks associated with snorkelling and scuba diving, Green Fins is helping to conserve coral reefs and marine ecosystems worldwide. Greens Fins has certified 289 dive centers in Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines and Thailand and is expanding into Vietnam and Maldives. For more information, visit greenfins.net for regional and greenfins-thailand.org for Thailand, or connect with us on Twitter and Facebook.

<sup>1</sup>Hunt, C.V., Harvey, J.J., Miller, A., Johnson, V.J., Phongsuwan, N., The Green Fins approach for monitoring and promoting environmentally sustainable scubadiving operations in South East Asia, Ocean & Coastal Management (2013), <a href="http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ocecoaman.2013.03.004">http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ocecoaman.2013.03.004</a>

# Voice of Volunteer

by: Chad Scott

Often in today's world it can be difficult to maintain optimism about the fate of our environment, especially our coral reefs. Often we feel that we alone care about these

things. . .That is until we actually start doing something about it.

Even after being in Thailand for 8 years, volunteering and working on marine conservation projects, I am still amazed on a daily basis at how many wonderful people are out there willing to help and get involved.

I originally came to Thailand to volunteer with a non-profit group called the Coastal Preservation and Development Foundation, and was based on Koh Tao doing reef surveys, teaching kids to swim, and tons of other tasks. I quickly learned that in volunteering you get back way more than you put in, in so many different ways. I met so many amazing people, and realized that we are not alone in wanting to protect our seas, there are actually tons of people out there who want to do the same thing. Most of them just don't particularly know how or where to get started.





Since then, I have started the New Heaven Reef Conservation Program, and later headed the Save Koh Tao Community Group's Marine Branch. Through both organizations I have had the pleasure of working with so many amazing individuals who have stopped their normal lives to dedicate their time and money to saving our reefs and improving our society. I have also gotten to work with many great organizations, universities, non-profits, and government groups on projects related to all aspects of coral reef research, restoration, and protection. Together we have trained hundreds of divers and volunteers in skills and techniques that they can use to assist on local projects or start their own projects in other areas.

Despite the negativity we may feel when looking at the problems affecting our oceans, working on the solutions together with others is a truly amazing and uplifting feeling. When we decide for ourselves that we are going to make change happen, and make the first few steps in the right direction, others quickly join in.

There are so many ways that we can all get involved in projects that better our society or our environment. Don't know where to start? Check out the great resources available through groups like Green Fins and learn how you can protect the areas you visit. Also be sure to ask at the environmentally responsible businesses in places you visit to see if they can point you to any volunteer opportunities going while you are there. If you are more serious, take a marine conservation course and learn all you need to know to start and lead your own projects in the areas that matter to you. We can all make a difference, and have a great time along the way.

#### Special Article

### Direction of Green Fins in Thailand

**By: Petchrung Sukpong** 

The special article in this volume was captured from the Regional Project Review and Network Meeting, which was held on 3<sup>rd</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> April 2014. Green Fins activities in Thailand are sustained largely as a result of the inclusion of Green Fins activities in one component of DMCR's GEF/PEMSEA ICM Project with major plans in 2014 to make Reef Watch online training tools which will be accessible to the Green Fins network.

Mr. Niphon Phongsuwan of the Office of Inspector General and coral reef expert, Department of Marine and Coastal Resources (DMCR) presented the developments of Green Fins in Thailand since it started in 2004. Green Fins Thailand was implemented by the Phuket Marine Biological Center (PMBC) with support from UNEP/COBSEA until the end of 2008. A Green Fins Association was established at this time to raise funds to run Green Fins activities, but this was eventually terminated in mid-2013 due to funding limitations and lack of staff. Mr. Phongsuwan suggested that while establishing Green Fins as an association may support national efforts, but government support was still required in Thailand to implement and sustain activities.

PMBC is now running Green Fins with a small number of staff and modest but regular funding from DMCR as a result of the inclusion of Green Fins activities in one component of DMCR's GEF/PEMSEA ICM Project. Regular recruitment of volunteers also helps sustain activities. Currently, Green Fins Thailand has 150+ company members and 200+ individual members. The Green Fins Thailand website now includes the Reef Watch database where members can submit coral reef monitoring data online. To date, 430 Reef Watch data sets have been submitted. As part of the Reef Watch activities, Green Fins dive operators have been encouraged to 'adopt a reef' which they are encouraged to monitor consistently. A guideline to the CoC has also been developed to provide advice on practical implementation. A major challenge Green Fins Thailand is facing is the increasing number of tourists and snorkeling and boat operators, and instilling lasting changes to people's behavior for environmental protection. Advice and information supporting development of green tourism policies is also provided to concerned government agencies.

The focus is now on strengthening the Green Fins Thailand network, including expanding the membership in terms of numbers as well as geographically, and actively recruiting 'high quality' members. In 2014 the 'No fish feeding' campaign will be intensified; videos for training Reef Watch are currently being developed in Thai and English and will be available online and the Reef Watch database to be shifted to the international website; and training of GF Ambassadors (the main contact person for each dive centre) will be conducted. The Thailand presentation is attached as Annex 10.

The following conclusions and recommendations may be drawn from the presentation:

- Raising funds for sustaining Green Fins activities is very time consuming and requires hard work. Volunteers
  are a valuable asset but unstable in the longer term. Setting up associations or NGOs to support Green Fins
  activities need to be carefully considered, and is recommended to only be done as a supplement to efforts by
  government and other existing partner organizations.
- To provide long term commitment and support for Green Fins, it should be aligned with national targets and commitments and anchored within national frameworks.
- Green Fins Thailand suggested the Reef Watch database is shifted from its national website to the international website.
- Green Fins Thailand plans to make Reef Watch online training tools which will be accessible to the Green Fins network.
- Branding and promotion is an important next step in the development of Green Fins internationally.

Source: The Regional Project Review and Network Meeting in Bangkok,  $3^{rd} - 4^{th}$  April 2014. United Nation Environment Programme and Reef World Foundation.

As Green Fins – Thailand volunteer several years, I use my expertise to train people how to reduce chemical use on a boat, and toiletry. "Minimum discharge policy" is one of the Green Fins Code of Conduct that I practice myself by selecting an eco-friendly ingredients to make my own cleaning products such as head and body wash, dish washing detergent, and multi-purpose cleaner. To eliminate fat, oil, grease, stains, waste, and odor, I use selected microorganism from laboratory which help to degrade waste, control orders, and remove stains. Future more, I use plant-based surfactant which is biodegradable when its release into the environment. I willing to train you the fresh homemade cleaning products if needed. For whom who don't need to do it by yourself, I can make fresh homemade cleaning products for your shop by order. You can also buy a small package that I established brand new, of which "The ECOTho".

# Pay it forward to our ecosystem, being an Eco-friendly community today

By : Petchrung Sukpong (Aey)





The ECOTho, environmentally responsible products to the sea and watershed ecosystem which provides fresh homemade cleaning products in Phuket and sell products directly to dive operators and boaters. Cleaning products are including an ultra mild head & body wash, ECO-Clean (multi-purpose surface cleaner), Bio Wash (dishwashing detergent), DIY personal cleaning set, and the dealer of ANA-E Plus (selective microorganism for cleaning and remediation). Basically all cleaning products of The ECOTho are Phosphate free, non Sodium Laureth Sulfate (SLES) and Sodium Lauryl Sulfate (SLS) which are lethal to fresh water fish at 7 ppm (part per million) and do not break down well in the environment. For packaging, I recommend to refill your used The ECOTho containers which will reduce waste to the earth and save money as well.

With concern about both human health and environmental safe, I encourage you to become an eco-friendly community and reduce a chemical used which will affect to our ecosystem from ridge to reef. More detail about the cleaning products, please see at The ECOTho blogspot. Please contact me at ecocafephuket@gmail.com, reefwatchthailand@gmail.com, Tel. 081 373 5447



Reef Watch Training in Koh Tao, 4<sup>th</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> July 2014: Save Koh Tao – Marine Unit and Green Fins – Thailand had organized Reef Watch Training. Project Leader, Mr. Niphon Phongsuwan who is the Office of Inspector General and the coral reef expert from Department of Marine and Natural Resources (DMCR) gave a talk about Green Fins in Thailand and Reef Watch monitoring methodology for dive operators and local school in Koh Tao. The aim of this training was an increased volunteer network to monitor a change at their doorstep. There were 2 workshops for diving operators and local school kids, of which 38 participants representative from 10 dive operators, and 33 local kids from Koh Tao school attend the workshops. Additional 21 participant's representative from government officers, school teachers, snorkelling tour operators had joined the training as well. On the 5<sup>th</sup> July, the school kids were trained both in classroom and field practice how to monitor coral reef health using simple Reef Watch technique. They have learned about coral bleaching phenomenon at the field site which was the current situation on the ground. They could estimate the percentage cover of coral and report via Reef Watch data online. Thank you very much to Save Koh Tao Marine's unit, Chad Scott, and our partners for the cooperation and warm welcome.







Snorkelling tour operator assessments in Koh Tao, 6<sup>th</sup> July 2014: Green Fins team had a great opportunity to conduct snorkeling tour assessment in Koh Tao. Three companies willing to offer a snorkeling day trip around Koh Tao and Koh Nang Youn in Suratthani province. The team found that the snorkeling tour operator's network in Koh Tao established regulations about snorkeling tour operation to reduce an impact to coral reefs on the island, of which not permit to use fins, not stand on or touch coral and marine lives, no fish feeding, and no litter. Therefore, they don't have a briefing standard and awareness materials to communicate with their customers. Green Fins will develop and design a snorkeling briefing material as per their request. Thank you for Oxygen Tour, Saengthong Tour and Turtle Tour to allow us on board.



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