

Reef Watch Member Questionnaire Results

In June, Reef Watch distributed a questionnaire in printed form to 160 recipients, and electronically to several hundred. In total, there were 71 responses.

Here is a summary of the responses for a few of the topics covered.

Training & Monitoring

The Reef Watch course has been running for two and a half seasons now, with 61 divers completing the course and twice that number part of the way through the course. Key findings include:

- all 71 respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the community had a role to play in monitoring reefs and other marine environments. All but five respondents agreed or strongly agreed that community divers/snorkelers are capable of collecting data that is valid for monitoring reef changes.
- of the 61 divers who have completed the course, 28 of them responded to the questionnaire, as did another 7 divers who had undertaken training during the early days of Reef Watch. This group had completed on average more than 6 monitoring dives each (one respondent had done 80 monitoring dives), and planned to do an average of just under two dives per season – slightly more in summer and slightly less in winter. Five divers did not intend to do any further monitoring dives.
- the respondents included 11 divers who were planning to start the course and 18 that had started already. It was noticeable that those who have started or completed the course indicated that they would be prepared to do a greater number of monitoring dives per year than those who were planning to do it but had not yet started.

Marathon Dives

All of the 31 respondents who had attended a previous Marathon Dive were interested in participating in future Marathon Dives. In total, 56 divers were interested in attending one or more Marathon Dives per year.

Only five of these divers thought the name of the event was not appropriate, although fifteen were undecided.

Here are some of the comments respondents made about what they find attractive about the Marathon Dive in comparison with other dives:

- *Variety of dives, combined with the social aspect. Oh... AND the BBQ!*
- *The company of more divers*
- *The amount of people which attend, signifies the communities enthusiasm for marine conservation*
- *Power of numbers, party atmosphere, more variety (boat dives).*
- *Opportunities to socialise, network & learn.*
- *Meet more like-minded divers, lunch, free air fills*
- *Lots of other people - good to get a snapshot*
- *I like the marathon dives because I usually get to dive with different people every time*
- *Got to see different parts of the reef than normally, i.e. outer reef and reef further south*
- *Doing something for the environment and biodiversity in an area you feel comfortable and excited about. Time to meet other divers and time to understand different levels of the commitment and understanding others have in relation to yourself.*
- *Big community event which feels as though something of importance is being achieved, also fun and great to meet others like-minded.*

But on the other hand:

- *Prefer other dives, am not sure how much a marathon dive really achieves, personally prefer small groups on monitoring dives, less messy, more time!*

Some important feedback about how to improve the event was also gained:

- *Pre sell dives so you know how many people are coming*
- *Need a faster way to get data into the system. Didn't like having to wait - no time to do everything else between dives.*
- *Maybe some live music, touch tanks.*
- *Attract wider community by placing a greater emphasis on snorkelling and fish identification with on-land briefings*
- *public on the jetty needs to be properly controlled arresting jetty jumpers may help control problem if not change the site !!*

About half of the 56 respondents who are interested in attending future Marathon Dives indicated that they would attend a Marathon

Dive if it were held at Second Valley. One respondent raised some interesting issues:

I wouldn't like to see a Marathon dive at Second Valley as the impact on the area and on Lasseter's Reef could be significant. Also there are many shellfish in the area which I have noticed others divers pick up and take with them and I am sad to see others picking up Volute shells and placing them in their BCDs. I feel that could occur and by spotlighting the region, the impact on the reefs could be quite significant. Already it is a popular dive site and car parking facilities are very limited.

There does seem to be sufficient interest to hold a Marathon Dive at Second Valley early this summer (see below) and we are confident we can manage most of the above concerns – although a lot will depend on individual divers!

The “Feral or In Peril” section of the questionnaire did cover some of these issues and the responses may to some extent ease the above concerns:

Only half of the respondents have a set of *Feral or In Peril* slates or otherwise know what species to look out for. Of these 31 respondents, half had seen one or more *Feral or In Peril* species in the last year, and ten of them had reported at least some of them. For those that didn't report, two indicated that it was because they didn't know where to start.

When asked what divers would do if they saw a black cowry, divers gave the responses shown in the table on the right.

Comments about the Feral or In Peril program included:

- *It is evolving - it's come a long way and because of anthropogenic influences, needs to go another long way. It is difficult to make people "aware". Programs like this help.*
- *Education can save our environment, and should be an greater part of dive courses, even my little daughter learns so much in the school about the marine life, a diver should be more informed from the start to know what to is endangered, it is in our interest to keep and protect what we can see tomorrow*
- *Do we have any clean ups planned? North haven is shocking. (fan worm).*

| Action | Number of respondents |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Just take it and not report it | 0 |
| Take it but report the sighting | 1 |
| Undecided | 8 |
| Just leave it and not report it | 16 |
| Leave it and report the sighting | 34 |
| Total | 59 |