



Welcome to Reef Check Malaysia's first newsletter of the year!

Happy New Year everyone and welcome to Reef Check Malaysia's first newsletter of 2019! 2018 was a very busy and productive year for us. It was also the 3rd International Year of the Reef (IYOR) and we conducted several programmes in conjunction with it. Below is a recap of 2018 as we look forward to this year.

Reflecting on 2018...

As the International Year of the Reef 2018 comes to a close, we have to ask: "are our coral reefs in a better state than they were at the beginning of the year?". Sadly, the answer seems to be no – but this is not just because of local factors.

Realistically there is little that local managers can do about the growing global threats to coral reefs – ocean warming, stronger storms, ocean acidification and so on. Our job is to make sure that our reefs are as healthy as possible so that they have a higher chance of surviving these events that are caused by these external factors that are beyond our control.

So how are we doing on that score? It's a pretty even balance between some conservation successes and some failures. Some things are working. Efforts by Department of Marine Parks Malaysia to introduce local participation in management have been moving forward, definitely a step in the right direction. On the ground conservation programmes run by a variety of NGOs conducting community development, turtle conservation and so on, have been showing some good results. New MPAs proposed in Sabah would ensure that the state reaches the Aichi Target commitment of 10% of maritime waters within an appropriate managed area.

On the other hand...there is always room for improvement. Further work needs to be done to increase compliance with Marine Park rules and regulations; better patrolling is required to reduce incidences of poaching. Let's hope the recent move of Marine Parks into the Department of Fisheries will allow it to continue its important work on conservation of marine resources. The Department of Fisheries now takes on this responsibility and we look forward to working with them to achieve the various international obligations that Malaysia has signed up to, and ensuring sustainable livelihoods and food supply for the future.

And so we look forward to 2019. We are hoping to extend our community programmes in both Tioman and Sibu, to embed community participation into the Marine Park management system on those islands. In Mantanani Island, we will continue to work to establish a community-managed area on the island, allowing the local community to have a significant influence in how the island's resources are managed. Our survey programme will once again cover over 200 sites around Malaysia – the 13th year of continuous surveys, creating a dataset unrivalled in the region. Green Fins will see us re-visit over 70 dive operators around Malaysia to conduct assessments, as part of the on-going programme to reduce the environmental impacts of the diving industry. Finally, we will continue to work on our marine debris campaign, which is bringing together a multi-stakeholder group from industry and government to try to reduce the amount of plastic escaping into the environment.

A busy year finishes; a busier one ahead. We would like to take this opportunity to thank all our supporters – whether they be eco-divers, volunteers, funders, local communities, government agencies – and hope that you will continue to support us in the years ahead.

Plastics Recycling Campaign

In 2018, we at RCM started working on a nationwide plastics recycling campaign in Malaysia to address the issue of marine plastic pollution. Malaysia has been ranked 8th in the world for the worst polluter of mismanaged plastic waste and it is a daunting problem that requires comprehensive, multi-pronged solutions and commitment from various stakeholders.

Throughout the year, we have organised many workshops and meetings with several stakeholders to address the issue of plastic pollution and recycling. In October 2018, we attended the Plasticity event which saw various key industry players and stakeholders come together. The event also included a stakeholders' workshop that discussed possible solutions for addressing plastic waste and increasing recycling rates.



A panel discussion session during the Plasticity event

We have started preliminary discussions with key players such as government, brand owners, waste management companies, NGOs, plastic manufacturers, recyclers, and waste collectors. On 10 December, we hosted a meeting with them to draft out action plans to achieve our goals. We are working towards a higher national recycling rate, less waste going to landfill, and less waste leakages into the environment. The long-term goal is to drastically reduce marine plastic pollution in our ocean, and our efforts will continue this year.

EcoDiver Training and Surveys 2017

In 2017, we successfully trained 117 new EcoDivers (including those certified by our Reef Check facilities) and 9 new EcoDiver trainers around Malaysia. We also took the opportunity to build our capacity regionally by training trainers from the Philippines and Taiwan. Thank you to our new EcoDivers for joining us, and we look forward to seeing all of you on our surveys this year.

For 2017, we have data from surveys at 217 sites around Malaysia! The results of our surveys show that Malaysian reefs have a live coral cover of 42% which is considered to be in fair condition. Our annual report will be out soon, so stay tuned for more information regarding our surveys and the health of reefs in Malaysia.

A huge shout out to all our EcoDivers who have been tirelessly joining us on our Reef Check surveys around Malaysia every year. Without your support, we would not be able to complete our surveys. It has been fun working with all of you and we hope to see you again for our surveys this year! For those interested to become EcoDivers, please feel free to contact us at ecodiver@reefcheck.org.my. For more information on the EcoDiver training programme, please visit our website at www.reefcheck.org.my.

Tioman Island Programme – Cintai Tioman

We have now completed 5 years of the Cintai Tioman community project! It has been an amazing 5 years of learning and understanding the local community on this island. We've also successfully implemented many programmes and initiated many new efforts on the island, much of which are still carried out today.

Some of the various programmes we have conducted include:

- Skills training for local islanders: computer skills, business and finance trainings, reef rehabilitation trainings etc
- Initiated a recycling programme on the island. We now have a baling machine for plastic bottles and aluminium tin cans, as well as a glass crushing machine on the island.
- School education programmes with the local school students
- Organised beach clean-ups with villagers and other NGOs

One of our biggest success stories on the island to date is the establishment of the Tioman Marine Conservation Group (TMCG). This group comprises of local islanders who have been trained to carry out several management and conservation activities on the island such as reef rehabilitation and coral reef monitoring. This team has also assisted in the recovery of many ghost nets found floating off the waters of Tioman. They have teamed up with the Department of Marine Parks (DMPM) and the local dive centres as well as other NGOs on the island for these tasks.



Members of the Tioman Marine Conservation GROUP (TMCG)

Needless to say, we have come a long way in this project, and we are proud of what we have achieved. Our 5-year funding for this programme ends in February 2019. If you would like to see us continue our efforts, you can donate at www.reefcheck.org.my or drop us an email at wecare@reefcheck.org.my to see how you can support us.

We look forward for this 5th year of continuing our efforts to empower the local community to be more involved in the management of their island's natural resources.

Do follow us on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/CintaiTioman> for regular updates on our programmes and activities on the island.

Updates from Sabah and Mantanani

In November 2018, there was a Crown-of-thorns outbreak on Mabul Island in Sabah. Multiple stakeholders including dive operators joined hands to fight against this outbreak. Some of those involved, besides Reef Check Malaysia are:

- Mabul Paradise Lodge
- Seaventures Dive Rig
- Sipadan Mabul Resort (SMART)
- Uncle Chang's Sipadan Mabul Dive Lodge
- Scuba Junkie Mabul Resort and Scuba Junkie SEAS
- Seahorse Sipadan Scuba
- Borneo Divers Mabul Resort



The COT clean-up in progress



COTs feeding on corals

We also had help and tremendous support from the Semporna District Officer, Tn. Bianus Kontong, Sabah Tourism Board and Semporna Community College. Majlis Daerah Semporna also played a major part as they have been receiving and burying the COTS that was collected and sent to Semporna.

As for our Cintai Mantanani community programme, it is now into its 4th year. The long term goal is to have Mantanani Island as a community managed protected area. Some of the activities we conducted in 2018 includes a Computer Literacy Training for the locals. We have 4 batches who have signed up for 10 series of trainings which are expected to be completed by February 2019. This training is done as part of capacity building for the islanders. We also received two new laptops from KWAP to be used for this training.

Another major effort on Mantanani is the recycling programme we have introduced on the island. In Kg. Padang, we have rented a place to start a Plastics Recycling Centre which is expected to be fully operational by March 2019. We will expand this programme to every household in this village in the next few months. At the same time, we have also kickstarted a pilot waste management system in Kg Siring Bukit. 20 houses have agreed to participate in this trial system for their village. Each household was asked to segregate their household waste according to different categories, which will be collected everyday by our local team. From November to December 2018, more than 1000kg of food waste were collected and saved from being thrown into the sea.



Computer literacy training for the locals



The local team managing the recycling efforts

You can follow us on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/cintaimantanani/> for updates on this community programme.

Dugong and Seagrass Conservation Project in Pulau Sibul, Johor

This project, which also involves the local community on Sibul Island, is now into its 3rd year. The goal in this project is to ensure the local community has a say in the management of this protected area.

Last October, we organised a meeting in Mersing which was attended by stakeholders such as the local villagers, resort operators on the island and officers from different government agencies. This meeting was conducted to decide on the setting up of a joint committee which has representatives from all the local stakeholders. The Sibul Island Management Committee (Jawatankuasa Pengurusan Pulau Sibul – JKPS) will be set up soon to manage matters related to the environment and community life of the island.



The stakeholders during the meeting in Mersing

Sustainable Development Goals



The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) was developed at the 2015 UN Summit and officially came into force in January 2016.

These 17 goals are a call for action by all countries to promote prosperity while protecting the planet. The SDGs, adopted by world leaders, will see countries mobilising their efforts to end all forms of poverty while building economic growth and addressing a wide range of social issues such as education, job opportunities and other issues related to the environment such as climate change.

These goals are not legally binding but countries are expected to establish their national framework towards achieving them over the next 15 years. Malaysia is also on her way to achieving some of these goals, and we at Reef Check Malaysia will be putting more focus on achieving some of these goals and targets through all our programmes from this year onwards. These goals are a blueprint to achieving a better and more sustainable future for all by 2030.

Here are some of the goals which align with RCM's programmes and activities:

- SDG 1 - End poverty in all its forms everywhere
- SDG 2 - End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

- SDG 4 - Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
- SDG 5 – Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
- SDG 6 - Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
- SDG 8 - Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all
- SDG 10 – Reduce inequality within and among countries
- SDG 11 - Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
- SDG 12 - Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns
- SDG 13 - Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts
- SDG 14 - Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development
- SDG 16 - Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels
- SDG 17 - Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development