

The Green Fins Project

Thailand

June 2014

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Background Information

Coral reefs are necessary for feeding, mating and breeding open ocean species. With their aesthetic value they are a recreational resource as well as a fishery resource for the 275 million people living within 30 km of a coral reef ecosystem. However, despite their important role in our ecosystem, global and local pressures currently threaten 75% of all reefs. At the global level, climate change leads to thermal stress and ocean acidification. At the local scale, overfishing, destructive fishing techniques such as dynamite or trawling, coastal development and pollution from land run-off all damages to reefs. As the coastal ecosystem with reefs is part of 8% of the global GDP, this issue is crucial. Divers and snorkelers witness reefs degradations and have therefore an important role in raising awareness and in protecting it. In this context, the Green Fins project was launched by the United Nations Environment Programme and was implemented by the Secretariat of the Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia in Thailand in 2004 for the first time. The Reef-World Foundation also contributed to the success of this project.

Quick facts

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| Zone | National Territory |
| Time Frame | 2004 - Present |
| Theme | Marine Ecosystem Protection |
| Leading Agency | United Nations Environment Programme |
| Webpage | www.greenfins-thailand.org |

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Project and activities

The Green Fins project is the only world assessed environmental set of standards for scuba and snorkelling centres. Its aim is to pass on skills and knowledge on marine ecosystems protection as well as ensuring the sustainability of the tourism sector.

In practice, centres that agree to follow the Code of Conduct, receive free training by a Green Fins Coordinator once a year. This Code of Conduct is a set of 15 points designed to tackle the most common detrimental effects of scuba diving and snorkelling on the marine environment. After, a Green Fins Assessor makes sure that they are minimising their environment impact and advises centres on their weaknesses. Communication material is also created and distributed to centres. In addition, as this certification is the only internationally recognized environmental standard for the diving and snorkelling industry, it gives to the Green Finns member centres a strong competitive advantage in the tourism market.

In 2004, this project was implemented in Thailand with the help of the National Management Team staff from the Phuket Marine Biological Center. Local volunteers in Phuket also supported this programme. The network grew quickly with dive centres members supporting each other and the project was extended to other cities: Kho Phi Phi, Koh Lanta, Phuket, Koh Tao, Koh Samui, Krabi, Koh Phra Thong, Takua Pa, Koh Lak, Koh Lipe, Khao Lak and Pattaya. Once, the diving centres community were strongly involved, Green Fins started collaborating with local communities such as fishermen and schools to spread its message.

Outcomes

It is difficult to quantify the impact of this project on coral reefs. However, we can be sure that it succeeded in raising awareness on the need for coral reefs protection. The way the project has been implemented and developed is also really interesting. First, policy makers made diving centres actors of coral reefs protection

by giving them the opportunity to have a competitive advantage if they respected their environment. Once these actors were numerous and powerful, they extended the scope of the project to the sensitization of other key local communities.

This project leads to a double dividend. On one hand, coral reefs are less damaged thanks to the rules respected by members diving centres and to the raising awareness of local people. On the other hand, the environmental certification attracts tourists, develops the local economy and it leads to job creations.

The speed at which the Green Fins network has been developing is a strong indicator of its success. The project was implemented in Malaysia and Indonesia in 2008, in the Philippines in 2010 and last year in Vietnam and the Maldives. In addition, this worldwide organization is now composed of 11,000 scientists and experts and 1,000 staff. In April 2013, Green Fins published "The Green Fins approach for monitoring and promoting environmentally sustainable scuba diving operations in South East Asia" in the scientific journal *Ocean and Coastal Management*. The network is growing quickly but each country stays autonomous and has its own objectives to fulfil the mission statement.

Finally, the Green Fin project has now gone further than just the protection of coral reefs. More and more spin-off projects have been launched such as 'Say No to Plastic' awareness campaigns and shark awareness campaigns. Those projects rely on the collaboration of schools and local fishing communities among others. In 2012, Green Fins launched the Green Fins Ambassador Programme in the Philippines. The most enthusiastic diving guides received additional trainings and were encouraged to spread the message to their surrounding local communities. The success it received was so impactful that this programme has been replicated in many other cities in the Philippines.

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References

The following documents informed the development of this paper:

Greenfins Thailand website: www.greenfins-thailand.org/

“The Green Fins approach for monitoring and promoting environmentally sustainable scuba diving

operations in South East Asia”, Chloe V. Hunt, James J. Harvey, Anne Millera, Vivienne Johnson, Nipon Phongsuwanb, *Ocean & Coastal Management*, Volume 78, June 2013, pp35-44.

“Green Fins-Thailand: Coral Reef Conservation in the Face of a Tourism Epidemic”, Kosavisutte K., 2008, *Proceedings of the 11th International Coral Reef Symposium*, Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, 7-11 July 2008, Volume 2, pp1197-1198

