



Linking Tourism 2025 The Connected Visitor Economy Bulletin

November 2016

Green Fins - a proven approach for managing marine tourism industry growth

TIA is the peak industry body representing all sectors of New Zealand's large and diverse tourism industry. TIA lobbies local and central government to shape policies and create an environment that helps its 1,500 members grow and flourish. At the same time it provides targeted assistance to individual members and sector groups.

Tourism 2025 (www.tourism2025.org.nz), developed by TIA, is an industry led economic framework for achieving tourism growth. The Tourism 2025 planning framework is based around five interdependent themes, namely:

- Insight
- Connectivity
- Productivity
- Visitor Experience
- Target for Value

Insight "to drive and track progress" is at the core of the planning framework because individually and collectively we achieve better outcomes by making better decisions based on quality data and informed insight.

Tourism is flourishing

Tourism is currently one of the largest and fastest growing sectors in the world, keeping pace with other major sectors such as manufacturing and retail. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (2016), tourism and travel sector activities generate 10 percent of global GDP, the equivalent of US\$7.2 trillion, and support one in every 11 jobs globally.

The World Tourism Organization recorded around 1.19 billion international tourists in 2015, a leap from 1950 figures of 25 million, and it is predicted that this will double to two billion by 2030. The economic value and growth prospect of the tourism industry is thus clearly evident.



WHY TOURISM MATTERS

© World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) 2016

Current regional figures show that the Asia and Pacific region is experiencing the fastest growth in international tourist arrivals, alongside the Americas (close to 6 percent in 2015). More than half of these visits are for leisure and holidays with coastal tourism constituting a significant part. The adventures promised by vibrant coral reefs thriving below sparkling, blue waters and fringed by white, sandy beaches are a common draw for tourists.

Striking a balance

With this economic benefit comes environmental risk. Tourism can constitute a locally significant driver of marine life degradation, putting pressures on the ecosystem through direct and indirect impacts associated with developing infrastructure as well as other activities. Scuba diving and snorkelling, activities that were once exclusive to the wealthy adventure seeking minority, are nowadays enjoyed by a mass audience. This brings more and more people onto coral reefs with very limited knowledge of the fragility of the environment. There are an estimated one million new scuba diving recruits each year¹ that join six million active divers² globally in this international underwater party.

Intensive scuba diving, snorkelling and boating can directly damage corals, making them susceptible to other stresses and reducing live coral cover. Significant diver damage is often seen on frequently visited reefs. As a result, beach and reef tourism constitutes an increasing environmental threat and it risks undermining the very natural resource from which this sector has grown. This is of particular concern since reefs will face increasingly severe climate change impacts and the reduction of direct stress is critical to promoting their resilience and thus giving them a chance to survive.



Creating a demand

Studies³ have shown that programmes aiming to engage the tourism sector in approaches addressing these issues can support and contribute to sustainable management of reef resources. Such efforts would also respond to recent international calls for environmental management to incorporate building partnerships with industry, including tourism (e.g. the United Nations Environment Assembly-2 Resolution 12 on coral reefs).

Efforts to drive sustainable tourism growth are fast becoming common place in management plans and those businesses jumping on board are being rewarded by gaining recognition and appreciation from customers as well as gaining credibility when asking others to take action for environmental protection.

While there are a few programmes available to support best environmental practice for divers and snorkellers, there is only one that drives sustainability within core business practices; that engages successfully with the public and private sectors and that is resulting in measurable impact. This programme is called [Green Fins](#), a United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and [The Reef-World Foundation](#) led initiative which is paving the way for managing sustainable diving and snorkelling activities and effecting measurable and meaningful change within the industry worldwide.

¹ <https://www.padi.com/accordion-item/undersea-journal>

² http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.dema.org/resource/resmgr/Research_Documents/Diving_Fast_Facts-2014.pdf

³ Salm, 1986a, 1986b; Harriott et al., 1997; Medio et al., 1997; Zakai Chadwick-Furman, 2002; Barker and Roberts, 2004; Saphier and Hoffman, 2005



WHAT IS GREEN FINS?

An initiative of **UNEP** and **the Reef-World Foundation** that is paving the way to unite **politics and marine conservation efforts** to ensure the **sustainability** of popular diving and snorkelling destinations around the world.



Governments & NGO's

HOW DOES IT WORK?

Green Fins is a unique conservation initiative that successfully combines three approaches to inspire actions for **lasting and positive change**:



WHO IS GREEN FINS?



The network is composed of over **400 dive and snorkel centres** and a widespread group of **environmental champions** who give life to the message.

MEMBERSHIP PROCESS:

- 1 Free membership
- 2 Environmental Training
- 3 Environmental Risk Assessment
- 4 Consultation to agree on improvements
- 5 Certified active member (1 year)
- 6 Annual training and assessment
- 7 a) Continued membership (Top 10 dive centres with best assessment scores)
b) Suspended membership (environmental standards are not improved over time)

BY FOLLOWING THE GREEN FINS PHILOSOPHY YOU CAN BE PART OF THE VOICE OF THE SUSTAINABLE DIVING INDUSTRY!



ALL Green Fins materials are available for **FREE DOWNLOAD: greenfins.net/downloads**

We want to hear from you! We would appreciate all feedback, good and bad, on member's actions and activities: www.greenfins.net/report-form

Green Fins was introduced in 2004 as the first code of conduct for diving and snorkelling business practices. Over the past 12 years more than 600 dive and snorkel operators representing more than 3,000 individuals, 11 government agencies, 18 NGOs and four community groups have been involved in developing Green Fins as a practical solution to address the most urgent environmental threats posed by the industry. Today it is a proven⁴ approach to support divers, diving industry and governments protect coral reefs, encompassing:

- an environmental code of conduct for diving and snorkelling centres;
- a robust assessment system to monitor and promote compliance with the code;
- support towards developing or strengthening relevant regulatory frameworks; and
- strategic outreach to and capacity building among diving and snorkelling centres, as well as governmental agencies.



Code of Conduct

As a Green Fins Member, you are expected to:



- 1 Adopt the Green Fins mission statement
- 2 Display the adopted Green Fins agreement for the public to see
- 3 Adhere to the 'Green Fins' Friendly Diving and Snorkelling Guidelines and act as a responsible role model for guests
- 4 Participate in regular underwater cleanups at dive operator selected sites
- 5 Participate in the development and implementation of a mooring buoy program and actively use moorings, drift or hand place anchors for boats
- 6 Prohibit the sales of corals and other marine life at the dive operation
- 7 Participate in regular coral reef monitoring and report coral reef monitoring data to a regional coral reef database
- 8 Provide adequate garbage facilities on board facility's vessel and deal with responsibly
- 9 Operate under a 'minimum discharge' policy
- 10 Abide by all local, regional, national and international environmental laws, regulations and customs
- 11 Provide guests with an explanation of Green Fins' Friendly Diving and Snorkelling Guidelines in pre dive briefings
- 12 Provide training, briefing or literature for employees and guests regarding good environmental practices for snorkeling, diving, boating, marine wildlife interaction and other marine recreational activities
- 13 Provide staff and guests with public awareness and environmental materials (ID books, pamphlets etc)
- 14 Provide guests with information on local Marine Protected Areas, environmental rules and regulations
- 15 Promote a strict 'No Touch' policy for all reef diving and snorkelling.



www.greenfins.net



⁴Hunt et al 2013. *The Green Fins approach for monitoring and promoting environmentally sustainable scuba diving operations in South East Asia.*

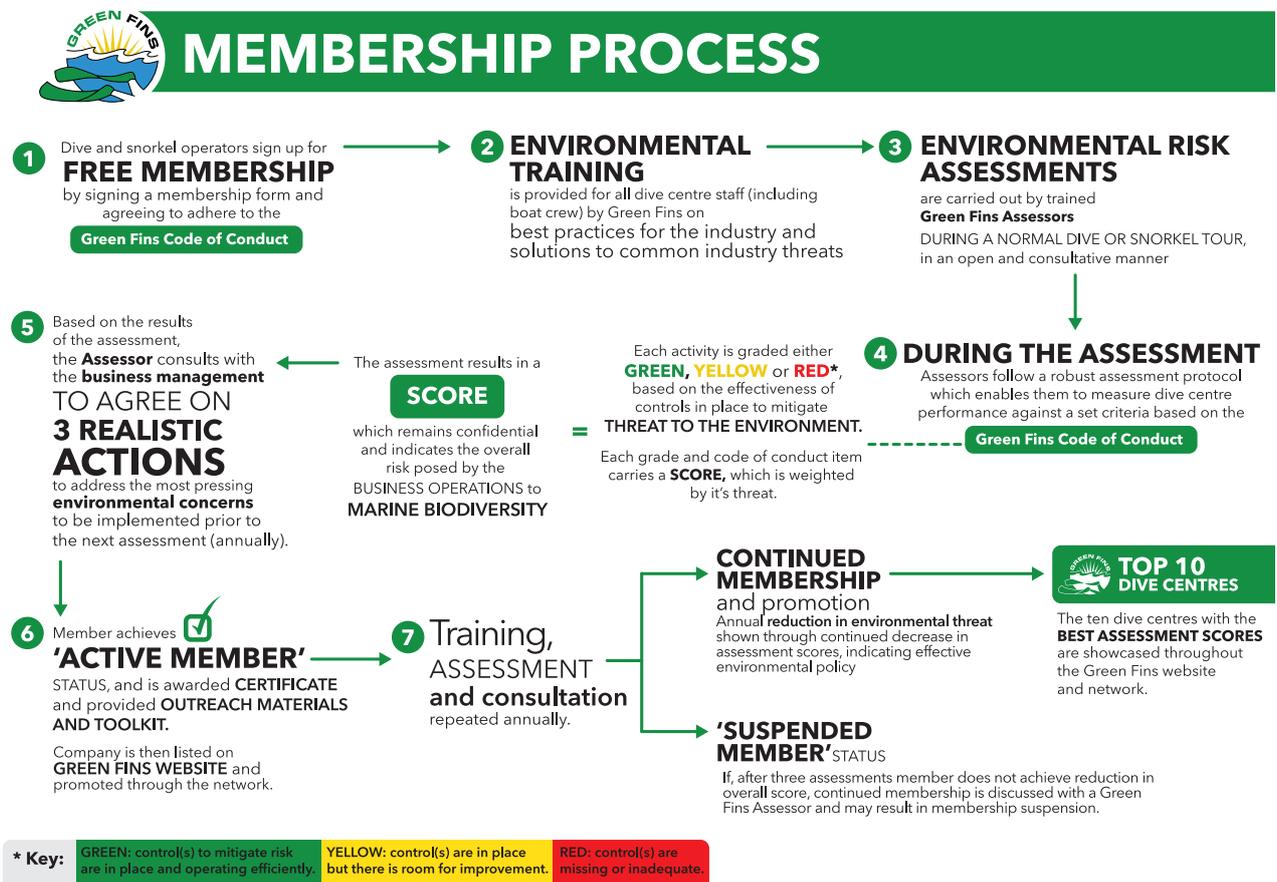
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ocecoaman.2013.03.004>

Roche et al 2016. *Recreational Diving Impacts on Coral Reefs and the Adoption of Environmentally Responsible Practices within the SCUBA Diving Industry.* DOI 10.1007/s00267-016-0696-0

While coral reef rehabilitation programmes such as coral nurseries may create glossy news stories, they are expensive and unreliable, especially when conducted without the support of experts. A much more economically and environmentally viable option is to protect our existing reefs and allow them to bloom. Through Green Fins, businesses are able to prioritise actions to mitigate threat, thus reducing the environmental risk that their business practices may be posing to their treasured dive sites and house reefs. Environmental performance is assessed annually by trained assessors who join normal dive and snorkel tours to review all business practices. Practical and realistic solutions are identified for high risk activities.

Examples of recommended actions include eliminating the use of single use plastic bottles for drinking water, making use of local recycling options for safe disposal of toxic chemicals such as used oil and batteries, and making environmental content in pre-dive and snorkel briefings common practice. While these actions often require implementing lasting changes in daily core business practice, they generally do not require significant financial investment.

Alongside this, targeted training and outreach activities such as short workshops with dive and snorkel staff raise awareness to marine conservation issues and build capacity to address daily common challenges in the workplace. A comprehensive [Green Fins 'Toolbox'](#), launched in April 2016, provides [operational handbooks](#), materials and tools that cover all aspects of Green Fins implementation, learning and outreach to support continued application and replication globally.



Membership is offered free of charge and certification is maintained through continued improvement in environmental scores (a score of 330 represents high environmental risk and 0 low risk) indicating an ongoing commitment to protecting the local marine environment. In return, dive and snorkel businesses are listed on the Green Fins website, promoted through online networking and at international conservation and dive shows. Members can also use Green Fins in their marketing and display the UNEP certificate of participation within their centres to engage with the growing customer base of tourists looking for environmentally responsible options for their holidays.

Uniting governments and industry for sustainability



Green Fins is implemented at national level based on a network approach, bringing together industry and government agencies with technical advice from UNEP and The Reef-World Foundation. The programme is currently operating in six countries in Asia: Indonesia, Malaysia, Maldives, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam, and is being further expanded in the region. The total membership stands at over 400 diving and snorkelling operators that seek to continually improve their business practices to mitigate negative environmental impacts. Governments are also using Green Fins in delivery against national and international environmental targets. For example, it forms part of the Department of Marine Parks Malaysia's Key Performance Index for the delivery of Aichi Target 10. In the Philippines, the government has adopted the Code of Conduct as a guideline for environmentally sustainable diving. Similar efforts are underway in the Maldives and Vietnam.



Green Fins makes industry a partner in environmental management, putting business owners in control of protecting their natural asset. By systematically eliminating negative environmental impacts, businesses can increase the health of coral reefs and ensure the sustainability of the ecosystem services that they provide for people and businesses. Businesses that are successfully following environmental best practice are also noticing a shift toward a more loyal repeat customer base. These repeat guests tend to stay longer and are willing to pay more for services provided.

Improving consumer perceptions

For many years the global travel and tourism market has been responding to a demand or, even more so, an expectation for sustainable products and services within the consumer group. However, there seems to be a slight misalignment when it comes to diving and snorkelling activities and this often stems back to basic lack of awareness. Messages seem to get mixed between being a skilled diver and one who follows sound environmental or even ethical practice. Irresponsible practices such as harassing marine life in order to orchestrate the perfect photograph seem to be accepted by consumers who would demand sustainability within other areas of their holiday. However, if it had been previously explained that inciting such behaviour from marine life is very stressful and may reduce their chance of survival in the longer term, it is likely that the diver would not have allowed the harassment to happen and it is even less likely that they would ask for it again. If done well, providing this sort of information actually adds value to the customer's experience generating benefits such as enhancing the quality of user generated content (UGC) in the form of reviews and feedback.

This is why Reef-World is embarking on a new project working with global experts to identify methods to catalyse desirable behaviour change within the consumer group. By understanding more about divers' perceptions, such as what makes a good diver or dive trip and why they make the choices they do, we can more effectively deliver targeted information to support sustainable actions above and below water.

By enhancing how informed the consumer is before they reach the dive centre door, or before they click that 'Confirm and Pay' button for the holiday of a lifetime, or even before they take the plunge and learn to dive, the demand for sustainable diving and snorkelling practice will be increased. This will support industry and policy changes already in motion with Green Fins within some of the most popular diving destinations on the planet.

Why should business lead?

Divers and snorkellers have a natural love for the ocean and coral reefs – so who is better placed to lead the way and effect change?

Service providers are the cornerstone for sustainability within their industry. Diving and snorkelling activities do carry significant environmental risk but, more importantly, if the activities are well managed then the opportunity for environmental awareness and education is enormous. Talk to marine biologists who are dedicating their life to marine environmental research, or conservationists passionately committed to environmental protection, and you will find that a common factor for choosing the careers they have is down to scuba diving or snorkelling experiences. Diving and snorkelling industry representatives have the ability to be leaders for environmental change within their local communities that is lasting and powerful.

Green Fins is the message and divers are the voice. The Small Medium Enterprises that make up this global industry have a very strong voice collectively. Joining the Green Fins network means joining the only international sustainable diving and snorkelling programme, recognised by divers and leading authorities as a programme that delivers on this objective. As part of the programme, dive and snorkel operators not only get the support of tailored environmental consultations but also find themselves with a neutral platform upon which to communicate to government and NGOs around the world as they seek ways to address local environmental issues even beyond marine tourism.

If Green Fins is available in your area, then [sign up](#) for free. If it is not available in your area then consider adopting and applying the [code of conduct](#) and guidelines within your business independently by following the [dive and snorkel centre handbook](#).

For more information visit www.greenfins.net

Watch Jim Toomey's Green Fins for a Blue Planet Video [here](#).

About Green Fins

Green Fins is paving the way to unite politics and marine conservation efforts to ensure the sustainability of popular diving destinations around the world. Established through a partnership between the United Nations Environment Programme and The Reef-World Foundation, Green Fins uses a unique and proven three-pronged approach; green certifications of dive centres, strengthening regulations and environmental education for dive staff, divers and government. Over 400 dive and snorkel operators across six countries have signed up for free membership, and are using Green Fins as a platform to set examples of sustainable business operations.

About the Author



Chloë Harvey is a professional diver and Marine Biologist who has been working on Green Fins development since 2008 after learning that it provided the only internationally recognised environmental standards for diving. Through the UK charity Reef-World, and with the support of UNEP, Chloë has built a skilled team who are successfully replicating Green Fins within major diving destinations across Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Vietnam and the Maldives. Today they work internationally to provide business owners and national authorities with the tools and support needed to drive a sustainable industry. Chloë and the Reef-World team believes that the potential influence of the diving industry as an agent for positive environmental change can far outweigh the environmental risk of diving activities, and this philosophy lies in the heart of Green Fins.



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