

Press Release
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REEF-WORLD LAUNCHES GREEN FINS CROWN-OF-THORNS SEA STAR CLEANUP GUIDELINES

New guidance helping marine tourism operators conduct Crown-of-Thorns sea star (COTS) cleanups in an environmentally friendly way

The Reef-World Foundation – the international coordinator of the UN Environment Programme's Green Fins initiative – has launched new guidelines to help dive and snorkel operators assess when to conduct Crown-of-Thorns sea star (COTS) cleanups and how to do so in an environmentally friendly way.

The guidelines give some basic ecological information about Crown-of-Thorns sea stars (*Acanthaster planci*) to help marine tourism operators learn more about the species and how they're different to other sea stars. The guidance also gives an overview of the role they play in a balanced ecosystem, why outbreaks occur, what signs indicate a COTS outbreak is happening on your reef and when and what steps you may need to take to protect your reef. For operators facing a COTS outbreak and are organising a cleanup, this document also includes tips to help ensure no further damage is caused to marine ecosystems in the techniques outlined.

Although a known coral predator, COTS' natural role helps maintain coral diversity in a balanced ecosystem. This is because, by eating the faster growing coral species like *Acropora*, they allow different, slower growing corals to grow and create colonies, forming a diverse reef. However, frequent or persistent COTS outbreaks can exceed coral recovery rates causing extensive damage.

Samantha Craven, Programmes Manager at Reef-World, said: "Over the years, we've heard from Green Fins members who are facing COTS outbreaks and need support in dealing with the issue without inadvertently having a negative impact on coral reefs. That's why we've created these Green Fins Crown-of-Thorns sea star cleanup guidelines, which summarise existing scientific guidance into one handy resource. The comprehensive resource can be used to ensure you and your team know when to act and are protecting marine habitats by following environmental best practice when dealing with an outbreak situation. We hope they're useful to our network of Green Fins members and non-members alike."

Gabriel Grimsditch, marine ecosystems expert at the UN Environment Programme, said: "COTS are well known to divers as a threat to corals, but they are also a natural part of a reef system. Keeping fast-growing corals in check allows space for the high diversity we are used to seeing, and COTS cleanups are not always recommended. The Green Fins Crown-of-Thorns Sea Star Cleanup Guidelines will help marine tourism operators gauge when a cleanup is really needed, and adapts information on conducting cleanups from COTS experts and reef management organisations specifically for the diving industry."

The guidelines are available free of charge and can be downloaded [here](#).

For more information, please visit www.reef-world.org or www.greenfins.net. Dive and snorkel operators interested in signing up to Green Fins can find the membership application form at: <https://www.greenfins.net/how-to-join>.

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About Reef-World

The Reef-World Foundation is a registered UK charity which delivers practical solutions for marine conservation around the world. The charity promotes the wise use of natural resources - particularly coral reefs and related ecosystems - for the benefit of local communities, visitors and future generations. It is dedicated to supporting, inspiring and empowering governments, businesses, communities and individuals around the world to act in conserving and sustainably developing coastal resources.

Reef-World leads the global implementation of the UN Environment's Green Fins initiative, which focuses on driving environmentally friendly scuba diving and snorkelling practices across the industry globally. As such, the charity provides low cost and practical solutions to local and industry-wide environmental challenges associated with the marine tourism industry. It provides education and capacity building assistance to empower environmental champions (within the diving industry, local communities, authorities and governments) to implement proven coastal resource management approaches.

Please visit www.reef-world.org to learn more or follow us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#).

About Green Fins

Green Fins is a proven conservation management approach – spearheaded by The Reef-World Foundation in partnership with the UN Environment – which leads to a measurable reduction in the negative environmental impacts associated with the marine tourism industry. The initiative aims to protect and conserve coral reefs through environmentally friendly guidelines that promote a sustainable diving and snorkelling tourism industry. It provides the only internationally recognised environmental standards for the diving and snorkelling industry and has a robust assessment system to measure compliance.

Green Fins encourages and empowers members of the diving industry to act to reduce the pressures on coral reefs by offering dive and snorkel companies practical, low-cost alternatives to harmful practices - such as anchoring, fish feeding and chemical pollution – as well as providing strategic training, support and resources. By reducing the local direct and indirect pressures tourism puts on coral reefs, it helps make corals healthier and more resilient to other stresses such as the effects of climate change. Look for the Green Fins logo when booking your next dive trip.

Please visit www.greenfins.net to learn more or follow the initiative on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#).