

Taveuni Ocean Sports Makes Dives Count for Coral Reefs

New research indicates that more than half of the world's coral reefs could die in less than 25 years. Human activities and climate change have contributed to the loss of 30 percent of the world's reefs to date; another 30 percent are severely damaged.

Julie Kelly and Aaron Mel, in partnership with PADI's Project AWARE and CoralWatch, are bringing a simple, non-invasive method of monitoring coral reefs to Taveuni. Volunteer divers match the color of the coral with a standard chart provided by CoralWatch, which identifies the different stages of coral bleaching and recovery. Changes in the color over time indicate changes in the health of an individual reef and allow comparing the health at different sites.

Scientists will use the data collected to help answer questions about coral bleaching, recovery patterns and how long bleaching events last. Regular monitoring helps scientists discover new ways to protect coral reefs from drastic decline.

Sports divers from Taveuni Ocean Sports will monitor the Rainbow Reef, the White Wall, and the other sites along the Somosomo Strait. These sites are among the most important reef communities in Fiji and known throughout the diving world. The data collected will add to the understanding of this global problem and aid in stopping the collapse of the reef eco-system. Volunteer divers are making a difference every time they dive.

CoralWatch, www.coralwatch.org, is a nonprofit research organization from the University of Queensland in Brisbane, Australia and is composed of leading coral biologists aiming to establish global coral reef health monitoring programs and raise public awareness regarding global warming.

Project AWARE Foundation, www.projectaware.org, is a nonprofit environmental organization working in partnership with divers and water enthusiasts to conserve underwater environments through education, advocacy and action.