

Calling All Divers to a New Conservation Cause
Earthdive Initiative to Boost Protection of Oceans and Seas

Cambridge/Nairobi, 27 July 2004 – Snorkellers and scuba divers across the globe are being enlisted to help save the world's oceans and seas.

A new initiative, called Earthdive, is being launched in which professional and amateur divers are being urged to record the health of the marine environment including coral reefs, mangrove swamps and coastal waters.

The scheme, which is being supported by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) through its World Conservation Monitoring Centre (WCMC) in Cambridge, England, is the brainchild of Chris Long.

Mr Long, a keen diver and the founder of Run the World (a mass participation event which raised awareness and funds for victims of the African famine in 1986) said: "If threats such as pollution, over-fishing and climate change continue, it could lead to dire consequences for the global population".

"Earthdive wants people with an interest in diving to understand that what they see under the oceans is not just beautiful, it also sustains human life, and they can help to preserve it by simply recording what they see," he added.

Klaus Toepfer, UNEP's Executive Director, said: "The world's oceans and their valuable habitats provide food and livelihoods for many people across the globe in activities ranging from fishing to tourism."

"In conserving the oceans, we are not only saving a key part of the planet's life support systems and many wonderful marine life-forms, we are also playing a key role in meeting the UN Millennium Development Goals in areas from poverty eradication to hunger reduction," he said.

Earthdive membership is extended to divers and snorkellers of all abilities, as well as anyone with an interest in marine conservation issues. The key feature of the scheme centres on encouraging members to record findings from their dives on the Earthdive website (www.earthdive.com).

By doing this, they will be contributing scientific data on key indicator species to build a Global Dive Log (GDL). This Global Dive Log is sponsored by P&O.

Members also sign an international petition, demanding action to protect the oceans, which will be delivered to the United Nations in 2005. Meanwhile 50% of all membership fees go directly to marine conservation projects.

UNEP-WCMC, which has been providing scientific assessments of biodiversity for a quarter of a century and is one of the world's leading centres for coral reef conservation, is providing a unique mapping service. It will allow divers to pinpoint locations and log their observations, which in turn can be shared with other divers and the scientific community.

Mark Collins, the Centre's Director, said: "We are making a significant contribution to the development of the Earthdive Global Dive Log through our innovative interactive map service (IMapS). By combining recreation with conservation, Earthdive can help spread important environmental messages to a much wider audience."

These sentiments are echoed by Coral Cay Conservation (CCC), another Earthdive partner. Formed in 1986, the organisation aims to help sustain livelihoods and alleviate poverty through the protection, restoration and management of coral reefs and tropical forests.

Much of their work depends on the goodwill of volunteers, who make tens of thousands of dives a year to survey marine life. Coral Cay Conservation's Founder and CEO, Peter Raines MBE, is a keen advocate of the Earthdive principles.

"There is a natural link between diving and environmental protection, and we are working closely with Earthdive to encourage more people to bring the two together. Recreational diving is a fast growing sport, with more than 1.5 million new divers being certified each year. Earthdive has a unique opportunity to unite this rapidly-growing community in vital conservation activities, which are ultimately of enormous benefit to us all," he said.

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Notes to Editors:

Members of the press are invited to use the following log-in and password to gain full access to the Earthdive web site and Global Dive Log at **www.earthdive.com**:

Log-in: press@earthdive.com

Password: oceans

About Earthdive

Earthdive is a revolutionary new concept in 'citizen science' and a global research project for millions of recreational scuba divers who can help to preserve the health and diversity of our oceans.

As a commercial organisation, Earthdive is also seeking to effect positive change towards a more sustainable marine environment by raising global awareness and financial support for the protection of our oceans.

At the heart of this unique research project is the Earthdive Global Dive Log (GDL), which has been developed in partnership with the United Nations Environment Programme - World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC), Coral Cay Conservation (CCC) and marine biologists from all over the world.

The Global Dive Log, sponsored by P&O, is a unique database into which divers and snorkellers log sightings of key indicator species and human impacts via online logbooks.

Observations of the illegal trade in endangered species are also recorded, which are then passed on to TRAFFIC, the wildlife trade monitoring network. TRAFFIC works to ensure that the trade in wild plants and animals is not a threat to the conservation of nature. It has offices covering most parts of the world and works in close co-operation with the Secretariat of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). TRAFFIC is a joint programme of WWF and IUCN – The World Conservation Union.

A unique point & click positioning system enables data to be fixed to specific map references and then searched and analysed via an interactive digital map. As divers and snorkellers log their underwater observations on the Earthdive web site, these logs will together create a unique and evolving 'Global Snapshot' of the world's oceans that can be used by decision makers at every level.

In addition to an international research project, Earthdive is also a global membership organisation and a conduit of advocacy for marine conservation. As each member joins Earthdive, their name is added to a Global Petition demanding action from policymakers to help protect our oceans, which will be presented to the United Nations during 2005.

Earthdive is committed to making a positive contribution towards marine conservation through active support and fund-raising.

Funding comes directly from contributions made by Earthdive members, with 50% of all membership fees going directly to Earthdive's selected organisations: Coral Cay Conservation (80%) and UNEP-WCMC (20%).

The selected organisations are directly benefiting the marine environment by carrying out important conservation projects, such as:

- Environmental assessment, research and/or monitoring programmes
- Education and/or awareness initiatives at a local level
- Alternative livelihood schemes and/or related community projects.

As the number of members grows over time, Earthdive will seek to increase the diversity and geographical spread of the organisations selected.

Log-on to **www.earthdive.com** to learn more about this global initiative and the host of benefits it offers to its members. These include:

- Creating an online Dive Log, using the unique Earthdive point & click facility to locate specific dive sites.
- Contributing to a 'Global Snapshot' of the oceans by completing an online Science Log for each dive, recording key indicator species and anthropogenic impacts.
- Accessing the Earthdive search facility for news stories, dives, divers, dive sites, dive centres, dive logs and key marine species.
- Accessing 30 regional pre-dive briefing packs containing essential information on 30 Earthdive eco-regions, key indicator species and tips on how to monitor them.
- Supporting selected marine conservation organisations.
- Using the Earthdive secure e-mail facility to catch up with old dive buddies or make new friends all over the world.
- Contributing to the Earthdive petition, demanding action to protect the health and diversity of our oceans.
- Supporting the Earthdive Code of Responsible Diving (eCord), as recognised by all dive centres registered on the web site.
- Accessing a host of other membership benefits including discounts on diving equipment, competitions and Earthdive branded merchandise.

These benefits are provided for an annual membership fee of just £10, of which 50% goes directly to Earthdive's selected marine conservation organisations.

Through Earthdive, sustained action can be taken in a global effort to monitor and conserve marine life on this planet.



About UNEP-WCMC

The UNEP-World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC) plays a fundamental role in monitoring the world's changing biodiversity. UNEP-WCMC is the biodiversity information and assessment arm of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

The Centre provides objective, science-based ecosystem assessments, support for implementation of environmental agreements, regional and global biodiversity information, research on threats and impacts, and development of indicators and future scenarios for the living world. In 2000 it became the first United Nations organisation to open in Great Britain.

UNEP-WCMC has recently published a number of successful titles that include The World Atlas of Coral Reefs, and The World Atlas of Seagrasses. These marine habitats are central to the life cycles of millions of marine species and their abundance profoundly affects global marine biodiversity. These habitats have therefore been included as an interactive layer within the Earthdive Global Dive Log for members to use and explore.

UNEP-WCMC's Marine and Coastal Programme is accompanied by the UNEP Coral Reef Unit (CRU) and the International Coral Reef Action Network (ICRAN), that work together to preserve this vital ecosystem. To find out more information go to Corals@UNEP-WCMC.

Donations from Earthdive members will be used to expand UNEP-WCMC's activity in marine and coastal conservation and monitoring.



About Coral Cay Conservation

Coral Cay Conservation (CCC), a not-for-profit organisation, operates a range of reef and forest conservation projects. Each year, hundreds of international volunteers join CCC expeditions to help alleviate poverty by providing countries with the information they desperately need to protect their tropical forests and coral reefs and use them in a more sustainable way. Coral Cay Conservation Trust is a UK registered charity, which supports the charitable work of CCC.

CCC's partnership with Earthdive is based on the opportunity to make a positive difference by engaging the global diving community in monitoring and conserving marine life.

Alongside UNEP-WCMC, CCC is providing technical and scientific resources to ensure that the Earthdive Global Dive Log becomes an important resource tool for coral conservation projects worldwide.

The funds raised by Earthdive will be channelled via CCC to areas of greatest need, such as conservation projects in the Philippines, Honduras, Malaysia and Fiji. Projects such as these provide the resources needed to develop and maintain sustainable conservation programmes in partnership with indigenous populations.



About P&O

The Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company (P&O) is sponsoring the Earthdive Global Dive Log. P&O's aspiration is closely aligned with Earthdive's vision: pollution-free oceans, diverse ecosystems and abundant marine wildlife.

P&O is a major international logistics and transport company founded in 1837. Its fastest growing business is the development of container ports around the world. P&O is also the leading ferry operator in the UK. The company provides cold logistics services internationally and also has some international property development interests. P&O also has a 25% shareholding in Royal P&O Nedlloyd, the company that owns the container shipping line P&O Nedlloyd.

Underpinning these activities is the international strength of the P&O brand, a commitment to customer service and a global coverage, knowledge and skill base in logistics and transport. P&O is committed to focusing its capital on those businesses where it is a market leader and which offer strong growth and value creation opportunities.

For a major industrial logistics and transport company, minimising adverse social and environmental impact is indeed a challenge. However, P&O's commitment goes well beyond a duty to simply manage its relationship with its stakeholders and the environment. The company aspires to implement the highest standards in best practice; to cause no pollution of the land and sea; and to improve the natural and social environments on which it relies.

The company has shown leadership in its sector by taking a proactive approach to the management of its social and environmental responsibilities through a programme of policies, objectives and target-setting designed to achieve continuous improvement.

P&O is seeking to make a positive contribution to communities in which it operates and to deliver improvements outside its immediate business boundaries. Environmental and educational projects are given a high priority in P&O's charitable donations programme and examples of recent initiatives include support for the Marine Life Preservation Society in Florida and the Biscay Dolphin Research Programme.

Through support for Earthdive and the development of the Global Dive Log, P&O is making a valuable contribution to the creation of a unique scientific database that will provide global knowledge on the changing state of the world's oceans.



Fifty Key Facts about Seas and Oceans

UNEP has compiled a list of fifty key facts about our seas and oceans:

1. Oceans cover 70 per cent of the Earth's surface.
2. More than 90 per cent of the planet's living biomass is found in the oceans.
3. Eighty per cent of all pollution in seas and oceans comes from land-based activities.
4. Forty per cent of the world's population lives within 60 kilometers of a coast.
5. Three-quarters of the world's megacities are by the sea.
6. By 2010, 80 per cent of people will live within 100 kilometres of the coast.
7. Death and disease caused by polluted coastal waters costs the global economy US\$12.8 billion a year. The annual economic impact of hepatitis from tainted seafood alone is US\$7.2 billion.
8. Plastic waste kills up to 1 million sea birds, 100,000 sea mammals and countless fish each year.
9. Sea creatures can be killed by plastic. Plastic does not decompose easily, so can remain in the ecosystem for many years to kill again and again.
10. Harmful algal blooms, caused by an excess of nutrients — mainly nitrogen from agricultural fertilizers — have created nearly 150 coastal deoxygenated 'dead zones' worldwide, ranging from 1 to 70,000 square kilometres.
11. An estimated 21 million barrels of oil run into the oceans each year from street run-off, effluent from factories, and from ships flushing their tanks.
12. Over the past decade, an average of 600,000 barrels of oil a year has been accidentally spilled from ships, the equivalent of 12 disasters the size of the sinking of the oil tanker Prestige in 2002.
13. Oil tankers, transport 60 per cent (approximately 2,000 million tons) of oil consumed in the world.

14. More than 90 per cent of goods traded between countries are transported by sea.
15. Each year 10 billion tons of ballast water is transferred around the globe and released into foreign waters.
16. Ballast water often contains species — such as the zebra mussel and comb jellyfish — that can colonize their new environment to the detriment of native species and local economies.
17. Pollution, exotic species and alteration of coastal habitats are a growing threat to important marine ecosystems such as mangroves, seagrass beds and coral reefs.
18. Tropical coral reefs border the shores of 109 countries, the majority of which are among the world's least developed. Significant reef degradation has occurred in 93 countries.
19. Although coral reefs comprise less than 0.5 per cent of the ocean floor, it is estimated that more than 90 per cent of marine species are directly or indirectly dependent on them.
20. There are about 4,000 coral reef fish species worldwide, accounting for approximately a quarter of all marine fish species.
21. The Great Barrier Reef, measuring 2,000 kilometres in length, is the largest living structure on Earth. It can be seen from the Moon.
22. Reefs protect human populations along coastlines from wave and storm damage by serving as buffers between oceans and near-shore communities.
23. Nearly 60 per cent of the world's remaining reefs are at significant risk of being lost in the next three decades.
24. The major causes of coral reef decline are coastal development, sedimentation, destructive fishing practices, pollution, tourism and global warming.
25. Climate change threatens to destroy the majority of the world's coral reefs, as well as wreak havoc on the fragile economies of Small Island Developing States.
26. Average sea level has risen between 10 and 25 centimetres in the past 100 years. If all the world's ice melted, the oceans would rise by 66 metres.
27. Sixty per cent of the Pacific shoreline and 35 per cent of the Atlantic shoreline are receding at a rate of one metre a year.

28. The phenomenon of coral bleaching is a major threat to coral health. In 1998, 75 per cent of the world's reefs were affected by coral bleaching. Sixteen per cent died.
29. The Plan of Implementation adopted at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) calls for a global marine assessment by 2004 and the development of a global network of marine protected areas by 2012.
30. Less than one half a per cent of marine habitats are protected — compared with 11.5 per cent of global land area.
31. The High Seas — areas of the ocean beyond national jurisdiction — cover almost 50 per cent of the Earth's surface. They are the least protected part of the world.
32. Although there are some treaties that protect ocean-going species such as whales, as well as some fisheries agreements, there are no protected areas in the High Seas.
33. Studies show that protecting critical marine habitats — such as warm-and cold-water coral reefs, seagrass beds and mangroves — can dramatically increase fish size and quantity, benefiting both artisanal and commercial fisheries.
34. Ninety per cent of the world's fishermen and women operate at the small-scale local level, accounting for over half the global fish catch.
35. Ninety-five per cent of world fish catch (80 million tons) is from near-shore waters.
36. More than 3.5 billion people depend on the ocean for their primary source of food. In 20 years, this number could double to 7 billion.
37. Artisanal fishing communities, who harvest half the world's fish catch, are seeing their livelihoods increasingly threatened by illegal, unregulated or subsidized commercial fleets.
38. More than 70 per cent of the world's marine fisheries are now fished up to or beyond their sustainable limit.
39. Populations of commercially attractive large fish, such as tuna, cod, swordfish and marlin have declined by as much as 90 per cent in the past century.
40. Governments at WSSD agreed, on an urgent basis and where possible by 2015, to maintain or restore depleted fish stocks to levels that can produce the maximum sustainable yield.

41. The WSSD Plan of Implementation calls for the elimination of destructive fishing practices and subsidies that contribute to illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing.
42. Government subsidies — estimated at US\$15 to US\$20 billion per year — account for nearly 20 per cent of revenues to the fishing industry worldwide, promoting excess fishing capacity and encouraging over-fishing.
43. Destructive fishing practices are killing hundreds of thousands of marine species each year and helping to destroy important undersea habitats.
44. Each year, illegal longline fishing, which involves lines up to 80 miles long, with thousands of baited hooks, kills over 300,000 seabirds, including 100,000 albatrosses.
45. As many as 100 million sharks are killed each year for their meat and fins, which are used for shark fin soup. Hunters typically catch the sharks, de-fin them while alive and throw them back into the ocean where they either drown or bleed to death.
46. Global by-catch — unintended destruction caused by the use of non-selective fishing gear, such as trawl nets, longlines and gillnets — amounts to 20 million tons a year.
47. The annual global by-catch mortality of small whales, dolphins and porpoises alone is estimated to be more than 300,000 individuals.
48. Fishing for wild shrimp represents 2 per cent of global seafood but one-third of total by-catch. The ratio of by-catch from shrimp fishing ranges from 5:1 in temperate zones to 10:1 and more in the tropics.
49. Shrimp farming, too, is highly destructive. It causes chemical and fertilizer pollution of water and has been largely responsible for the destruction of nearly a quarter of the world's mangroves.
50. Mangroves provide nurseries for 85 per cent of commercial fish species in the tropics.

Source: UNEP

UNEP News Release

