



SEARCH NEWS

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NEWS

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Oman

Sunday, October 19, 2008

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By A Staff Reporter

MUSCAT A study to assess the status of coral reefs around Musandam began earlier this month with experts from around the world.

There were authorities from Sultan Qaboos University, Biosphere Expeditions, Reef Check, Oxford and California and volunteers from HSBC.

Dr Matthias Hammer, Biosphere Expeditions' Managing Director, said on Sunday: "We will come back to Musandam each year to conduct our surveys, work with stakeholders and develop suggestions for its sustainable use and protection for future generations."

The surveys, spread over three years, are supported by HSBC which will contribute RO30,000, said Ewan Stirling, CEO of HSBC Oman.

Volunteers can join the surveys by signing up at HSBC Bank branches or the Biosphere Expedition website in the coming weeks. They need a dive qualification, a week's time and the willingness to help out, said Hammer.

The studies will examine reef health and effect of human activity and the results will be made available to the government for it to support sustainable eco-tourism and conservation policies.

The recent assessment was the first scientific survey. It carried out manta tows and reconnaissance dives at over 40 sites. Hammer said the reefs are in excellent condition with percentage coral cover reaching the highest levels seen in the world (80-90 per cent) and over 200 species present. Impact of human activity on the reefs are relatively low, but include gill net and trap fishing, periodic exposure to oil from spills, storm wave damage and predation by crown-of-thorns sea stars. Other threats are climate change and coral bleaching.

Students in Muscat schools were also told about Oman's beautiful underwater world and shown some of the diving equipment used during the expedition.

Stirling said HSBC supports organisations to reduce the impact of climate change. "We believe in long-term investment, sustainability and preservation of the environment wherever we operate and because coral reefs are especially susceptible to climate change, this project is a good example of our commitment."