

# Results of Reef Check 2022 announced (with photos)

The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) announced today (December 10) that the results of this year's Hong Kong Reef Check showed that local corals are generally in a healthy condition and that the species diversity remains on the high side.

The Hong Kong Reef Check 2022, a five-month exercise that started this June, covered a wide range of areas including a number of sites of ecological importance as well as the best coral-growing sites known in the eastern part of Hong Kong waters, extending from Tung Ping Chau in the north to the Ninepin Group in the south. Among the 33 survey sites, nine were within marine parks, including Hoi Ha Wan Marine Park, Yan Chau Tong Marine Park and Tung Ping Chau Marine Park.

A variation in coral coverage, ranging from 8.8 per cent to 74.3 per cent, was recorded among the survey sites. Fifteen sites recorded over 50 per cent of coral coverage, including five sites within marine parks. Among all sites, Sharp Island North recorded the highest coral coverage of 74.3 per cent.

An AFCD spokesman said, "Coral bleaching was observed this summer at 13 survey sites and caused concern. The AFCD formed an expert team with Hong Kong Baptist University and the Chinese University of Hong Kong to follow up on the coral bleaching situation. The expert team observed that corals at most of the coral bleaching sites had largely recovered subsequent to the drop in seawater temperature in November. The AFCD will continue to work with local coral experts and closely monitor the recovery progress of the corals."

Voluntary dive teams of the Reef Check also assessed the condition of corals at 19 sites using the Coral Watch tool. By measuring the colour intensity of the coral using a specially designed Coral Health Monitoring Chart, the health condition of corals can be determined. The deeper the colour, the healthier the corals. The average health index of the sites was 4.06, which was similar to last year's figure (4.15). However, the average health index is well above the general average value (3), indicating that the corals are generally in a healthy condition.

The Hong Kong Reef Check's survey method and data collection follow international standards. Reef Check divers recorded coral coverage and health status as well as other indicator species (including 20 species of fish and invertebrates). All the 20 assigned indicator species were recorded in the survey sites, with wrasses, groupers, butterfly fish, sea urchins, sea cucumbers and cowries found in abundance. A majority of the survey sites were found to have a high diversity of species. Most of the groupers, wrasses, sweetlips and snappers were found in survey sites at Port Shelter in Sai Kung and in north-eastern waters including Yan Chau Tong Marine Park and Tung Ping

Chau Marine Park.

No signs of destructive fishing practices were observed at any sites. Abandoned nets were found at nine sites but their impact was minor. The AFCD will arrange for a contractor to remove the nets.

The Hong Kong Reef Check is part of a global programme to promote the sustainable management of coral reefs. The Hong Kong Reef Check aims to raise public awareness of the ecological importance of corals and the need for coral conservation, and to provide updated information on local corals for conservation and management. The Hong Kong Reef Check Foundation held the first Reef Check in 1997. The AFCD has collaborated with the Foundation in conducting the survey since 2000, with growing attention and support from the public. This year, 108 dive teams involving over 800 volunteer divers took part in the exercise, representing about 20-fold the number in 1997. The AFCD awarded souvenirs and certificates to the Reef Check teams and participating scientists to recognise their contribution.

Coral reefs are highly productive systems, which support a high diversity of marine life. For the sake of coral conservation in Hong Kong, the AFCD continues to implement a series of measures and programmes. Key measures include designation of marine parks and marine reserves for conservation of the marine environment and protection of corals, organisation of a range of education and publicity activities to enhance public understanding of the importance of protecting the marine environment and coral communities. The measures also include a yearly Reef Check and studies to monitor the status of coral communities of Hong Kong and provide information for sound and adaptive management, installation of mooring and coral marker buoys to reduce coral damage caused by boating and recreational activities, and maintenance of a database to record the diversity and unique features of local corals.



