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# Reefs At A Precipice

An eco-warrior provides a voice to the region's endangered reef culture.

By Orla Doherty, Managing Director, PCRFB

In my journey with the Planetary Coral Reef Foundation (PCRF) at sea for the past decade, I have had the privilege of exploring the reefs and cultures of the South Pacific, Melanesia and Southeast Asia. I have glided over psychedelic fields of corals glowing with technicolour fish. I have found myself in waters so crowded that nearby divers disappear behind walls of life. I have engaged with dolphins in crystal clear seas. I have watched green turtles mating a few feet from me.

I have also seen the worst of the world's oceans: experiencing first-hand the demise of coral reefs on a planetary scale. In the Philippines and Indonesia, I have recoiled from the bomb blasts of dynamite fishermen while diving on the remnants of their once thriving coral reefs. In Papua New Guinea, I have snorkeled with lifeless fish spiraling in a dance of death, killed by cyanide, which kills the corals too. I have also watched as fins were severed from dead sharks while the living ones become a rare sighting.

In the vast central Pacific Ocean, I have witnessed the incontrovertible effects of global warming. I have returned to a reef in the Solomon Islands that I once knew like the back of my hand, only to find it unrecognisably destroyed by an earthquake and tsunami. It seems that whichever way I turn, there is trouble at sea.

Our ocean is our treasure trove. While a new species of giant manta ray has only just been

discovered on Africa's reefs, so too has the fact that global warming could wipe out coral reefs as we know them by the end of this century. In this uncertain world, there are still so many mysteries at sea and no clear answers.

To raise awareness of the demise of reefs, PCRF is publishing an introductory book for students to learn about the PCR-crisis. It outlines the basic principles of why coral reefs are important to our biosphere; how they function, and how other organisms live on them. The book will also describe the multi-faceted problems facing coral reefs around the planet today with illustrations of our experiences in a decade of studying and photographing them.

My fervent hope is that this book will help to lift the reefs from beneath the layer of salt water and grant them the global attention that they so desperately need. It is my sincere wish that it will provide essential information for the people of Southeast Asia in particular, as well as inspiration for all of us to make a difference.

*Please join PCRF and help us publish this book in both English and Bahasa Indonesia. For further information please contact me at [orla@pcrf.org](mailto:orla@pcrf.org).*

Orla Doherty

