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TCRF AND DEMA SIGN A MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING FOR DIVE
BOAT MOORING RESTORATION WORK

6 November 2012, Providenciales, TCI – The Turks & Caicos Reef Fund (TCRF) and the Turks & Caicos Islands Government’s Department of Environment and Maritime Affairs (DEMA) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) relating to the rehabilitation, enhancement and maintenance of dive boat and other moorings in the marine parks around the islands of Providenciales, West Caicos, Pine Cay, and French Cay. The MoU designates the TCRF as the lead organization in the effort to replace more than 30 missing dive boat moorings listed on the maritime charts around these islands while improving and maintaining the quality of over 20 other existing dive boat moorings.

“Over past few years, moorings listed on the maritime charts around these islands have fallen into disrepair,” said Don Stark, Chairman of the TCRF. “The moorings, located in the National Marine Parks, were installed to eliminate the need for anchoring which can be very destructive to the coral reefs. The loss of over half the dive boat moorings around the islands oftentimes forces dive operators to anchor when there are no moorings available. Although they are very conscientious about it and attempt to avoid damaging the coral, accidents happen and damage is done. Since the TCI is consistently rated as one of the top dive destinations in the Caribbean and tropical Atlantic region due to the beauty of our walls and the health of our coral reefs, it is critical to protect these valuable tourism assets.”

DEMA Director Kathleen Wood adds, “DEMA is charged with the installation and maintenance of dive boat moorings in the Protected Areas.. Unfortunately, DEMA is limited by staffing and financial constraints, so we were very pleased when the TCRF approached us about taking the lead for this program. We have worked with the TCRF on projects in the past and are confident that they are the right partner for us to oversee and coordinate the moorings program in the Marine National Parks.”

She also said, “DEMA appreciates the efforts of the various dive operators over the years who have taken it upon themselves to repair and replace missing and damaged moorings. The continued support of the dive operators is critical to the success of this effort and we hope that they will coordinate and collaborate with the TCRF and DEMA to further our conservation goals by reducing the improper anchoring at the many existing dive sites.”

Dive boat moorings in the TCI were initially installed many years ago, primarily by dive operators. After the establishment of the Marine National Parks, responsibility for the installation and maintenance of these moorings became the responsibility of DEMA and its predecessor agencies. No new dive site moorings have been added for many years and part of this effort by DEMA and TCRF will be to consider expanding the number of dive site moorings around each island. Another critical part of the effort is to replace mooring sea floor anchors that are environmentally harmful, such as chains wrapped around coral heads, with coral friendly sea floor anchors to further reduce the potential damage to our invaluable coral reefs.

The majority of funding for this program will come from TCRF with technical, manpower and some material support from DEMA. The majority of TCRF’s funding comes from voluntary donations from divers and snorkelers visiting the islands. “We estimate that we will invest at least \$50,000 in this effort over the next two to three years,” said TCRF Deputy Chairman David Stone. “We have already secured an anonymous donation of \$10,000 earmarked for this project and are looking for other major sponsors for the effort.”

The TCRF has already provided assistance to the local dive operators on Salt Cay and Grand Turk to replace the missing and damaged moorings around those islands. A total of eight moorings around Salt Cay were restored with material support provided by the TCRF. Over the summer, volunteers from several of the dive operations there reinstalled 11 missing moorings with materials provided by the TCRF.

“One of the keys to a successful dive boat moorings program,” said Don Stark, “is also the ongoing maintenance of the moorings once they are installed. Wear and tear on the ropes, shackles and chains needs to be monitored so that moorings

that are nearing the failure point, can be replaced before such a failure occurs. Moorings are sometimes also accidentally struck by passing boats and the lines to the sea floor anchors are cut. This situation also needs to be monitored so that missing moorings can be quickly replaced. As part of this program, we are developing a maintenance plan with DEMA to ensure that once moorings are replaced, they remain in good and useable condition. We will be looking to the dive operators for assistance in this effort by alerting the TCRF when they discover a problem with any of the moorings around these islands.”

The TCRF will be required to file quarterly reports with DEMA updating the Agency on the progress made on the project. The TCRF will also notify DEMA as to when work on moorings will be conducted in the National Marine Parks so that DEMA may monitor and assist with the work.

There will be a public meeting open to any interested party to discuss the plan moving forward on this project at DEMA headquarters on the Lower Bight Road at 5 pm on Wednesday, November 14.

About TCRF

Founded in 2010, the Turks & Caicos Reef Fund is an all volunteer-run organization that provides funding for education, research and conservation programs to individuals, organizations and agencies that help to preserve and protect the marine environment of the Turks & Caicos Islands. Our goal is to have at least 85% of all funds raised through voluntary contributions from divers and snorkelers visiting the Turks & Caicos Islands directed to the Fund’s programs.

About DEMA

DEMA is the governmental agency in the Turks & Caicos charged with the responsibility to ensure sustainable utilization of the natural resources of the Turks and Caicos Islands, and to protect and promote biodiversity and economic prosperity through a sustainable fishing industry and a protected areas system.

Anyone wishing to donate or assist the TCRF in any way can contact them through their website, www.TCReef.org. Scuba divers visiting the islands are encouraged to make a \$10 donation through the purchase of a dive tag that can be attached to their dive gear to show their support. Snorkelers visiting the islands can show their support through the \$5 purchase of a pink or blue silicone wristband. A complete list of outlets for TCRF merchandise can be found on the organization’s website.

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