



January 2002

Editorial....

Welcome to the all new MASWA newsletter. This is the first issue of our ever evolving new look layout and content newsletter. Hopefully you will find it much more aesthetically pleasing to read and be drawn to our interesting and sometimes entertaining articles.

As part of the changes to this newsletter we would like to give it a name, one that is somewhat fishy but also very catchy. If you have any suggestions please pass them on to myself or anyone at the meeting. The lucky person who comes up with the name for this newsletter will receive a prize, good luck!

David Bloch

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Upcoming Monthly Meetings....

January 29th

David Bloch

*18 Currambine Boulevard
Currambine*

February 26th

Terry Peake

March 26th

Marc Quaid

April 30th

Elmer Ellison

May 28th

Philipel Dor

Meetings start promptly at 7.30pm!

MASWA Contact Information...

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Newsletter Contributions

If you would like to make a contribution to the newsletter please don't hesitate to contact the Newsletter Editor, David Bloch on the phone number or email address listed above. Contributions to the newsletter need to be received no later than 7 days prior to the next meeting date.

December, 2002 Christmas Meeting...

Once again our annual Christmas meeting was at the home of Nathan, Nilufar and little Cameron. There was a great turnout (probably because there was a sausage sizzle!) which was fantastic to see.

Nathan's tank was looking awesome, especially the huge Tridacnid squamosa clams that are taking over his tank. The corals looked good too and all appeared to be thriving. The fish, (the few Nathan has!) all look fit, fat and fertile.

Interestingly Nathan's tank has been running quite warm, around 30 Deg C for a while with no incidence of bleaching.

Being the end of year meeting, the committee had decided upon a few awards. The following people won the inaugural MASWA trophies: Tom Devilee - "Fecund Fishy" Trophy, Grant Magil - "Slice and Dice" Trophy and Jan Anderson - "I did it My Way" Trophy.

A door prize raffle was also held with the winner, Dion Russel winning a book.

The night was a great success and it was great to catch up with everyone. On behalf of the committee I thank you all for supporting MASWA during the year and hope to see you at the next meeting.

January Meeting Information...

For this month's MASWA meeting we are heading north to the home of David Bloch (me!). If you are a "southerner" then please bring your passports and don't forget to dump any fruit or vegetables at the border crossing!

David's new tank is a not much bigger than the sump on his old aquarium and has only been setup for just over 4 months. It's a diminutive 61cm cube holding around 200 litres!

The tank is setup with live rock and seeded dead sand and has a downdraft protein skimmer and Metal Halide lighting. Being a gadget freak David has constructed a few DIY projects including the downdraft skimmer, a calcium reactor, wave maker and temperature controller to further complicate the whole setup!

The aquarium is still not entirely finished yet and still needs some cabinet work (I have to be nice to Tony to get him to finish my doors for me! Ed.) and a few centrepiece corals and a few more fish to be added. This however will all be done in time once the aquarium fully stabilisers.

There will also be a talk on problematic algal blooms in aquariums - what causes them and what can be done to get rid of them and prevent them occurring. This is the first of many planned talks planned for future meetings.

The address for the meeting is **18 Currambine Boulevard, Currambine** and starts promptly at **7.30pm**.

AGM 2003....

A new year is upon us and the time to elect the MASWA 2003 committee has arisen. Being on the committee is not a death sentence nor is it an easy task. It is, however, a vital role that ensures the survival of MASWA until the next lot of suckers volunteer in 2004 (woops Ed.).

There are many benefits to being on the committee, one being the opportunity to spend extra quality time with Tony (if he is elected to his old position that is!). Seriously, being on the committee gives you the opportunity to take an active role in shaping the running and direction of the society.

Last year saw the development and implementation of a committee and the beginnings of a workable constitution. This year we will further this and ratify the constitution as well as implementing new ideas and programs including a new member pack, talks on pressing, purchasing of water quality test and much much more.

The following committee positions will be up for election:

President

Vice President

Treasurer

Secretary

Newsletter Editor/Memberships

Web Editor

Social and Events Coordinator

Science Officer

General Committee Members

Whether or not you are interested in either nominating yourself or someone else please make sure you attend the January MASWA meeting. Your attendance is crucial in shaping the future of our society.

Memoirs of a Coral Farmer....

By Phillippe Dor

It all started in Cairns in 1997 after I received 2 boxes of assorted corals from Gove (Arnhemland) and destined to be distributed among several lease tanks I was maintaining,

Because it had taken almost two years to get this shipment and because some of those soft corals were so brightly coloured I decided to keep a few in my own set-up and would try to multiply them.

First I let them recover from their "ordeal" as they seemed to have suffered during transport, and after about 2 months of "quarantine" I started to separate them from their original rocks as some were clustered at too high densities. For that purpose I took a small ordinary kitchen knife and simply cut the mushroom corals off the rock by taking a very thin layer of rock with the mushroom base together.

I had built a shallow coral farming box from plywood/fibreglass (2.4m X 1.2m X 0.4m) with a special easy-to-clean full surface U-G filter (precursor of my now patented Ezyclean-Ezyreef system) and using a mixture of coral rubble, lime stone gravel and lava rock gravel as 10cm substrate layer for the corals to grow on,

The filtering action was accomplished by 4 airlifts of 50mm diameter and with an PVC elbow at the water surface to create a swirling current which was insuring that no part of the water in the "box" would remain stagnant,

The mushroom corals cut from the rocks were simply dropped randomly in the water making sure they were all in upright position, and then left to recover again and attach by themselves to the substrate, and to my great surprise they all did very well, even some that were damaged from the cutting off operation, and after only two weeks they were all showing signs of substantial growth.

As the recovery seemed so easy I started splitting them only about 5 weeks after the separation from the original rock and transfer to the gravel box. Again I used the same kitchen knife to do the cutting by taking the corals out of the water, placing them upside down on a plank previously wetted with some seawater from the box, and just cut between the small pieces of gravel attached to the base of the corals.

I tried very much to cut each coral exactly in two so that each half would have part of the mouth, but this was not always possible because of the obstructing gravel some pieces of cut corals ended up without any part of the original mouth and later still recovered well although much slower than they other properly cut mushrooms.

Realising that all this was quite easy and trouble free I started going around all the coral "Collector" in Cairns to pick out every week any specimen of mushroom coral I did not have yet, and after doing this for several months I had already a very nice collection of almost every known mushroom coral in the books.

Very soon I had to build more coral boxes and I also applied for an official farming license from the Fisheries Department which was very excited and very supportive of my project, and after 3 months and a minimum of "red tape" I was granted the first ever coral farming license in Australia,

The list of specimens kept growing as I added other soft corals and leather corals to my farming boxes, and also 3 species of caulerpa which were growing so fast that I could supply

them for export to Sydney and Melbourne together with some Turbo snails which I kept to keep my boxes free from filamentous algae,

After two years I started to get enough brood stock of the more common species to be able to export down south, but the demand was very slow and the prices I was getting did not reflect the effort I had put in and basically were not commercially viable on the Australian market.

I then contacted some importers in the UK and US and as the prospects seemed much better I applied for an export permit. Again the local Fisheries Dept were extremely helpful but now I had to deal with the Environment Dept in Canberra, and this was a completely different story and very soon I started "drowning" in red tape. They even visited my "farm" and I gave them a demonstration of the cutting technique, but they would not budge and kept on asking for more and more information like if I was a government research Institute.

In the meantime the corals kept growing and I had to keep splitting them and build more and more boxes to keep them (17 in total) but then early 2000 I suffered a heart attack followed 3 days later by a cyclone "direct hit" over Cairns which almost destroyed the infrastructure of my "farm".

That was the "drop" that made the bucket overflow, and we decided to leave Cairns after selling up. The final total was 21000 individual corals of over 35 different species sold to a Cairns exporter for a mere 50 cents per piece, the end of a 3 year dream and thousands of hours of back breaking coral splitting.

For the hobbyist interested in the biological side of this story, I have to say that coral farming is much easier than what most people think.

The coral boxes were outside in my backyard, in direct sunlight in the winter and covered with a clear and later blue tarp in the summer to avoid excessive rain and sun,

When I started cutting I was very careful and used very clean and sharp knives, but later on when I had to cut hundreds at a time all precautions were out as speed was important

and sometimes I even used blunt and rusted knives with no ill effects. Later my kids even helped me after only about 10 minutes basic training,

Growth rates were faster in the winter with temperatures between 20 and 26 rather than in summer were temperatures were averaging 28 to 32 and corals started making more reproductive materials like sperm and eggs instead of growing. Mortalities were a bare minimum (2-3%) but slightly higher in summer. Bleaching did happen in winter as well as in summer and was eventually avoided by the addition of Iron chelate to the water.

From my experience soft corals are not affected by any levels of ammonia or nitrite and can tolerate quite high levels of nitrates or dissolved organic matter. I never used any Protein Skimmers in the boxes and was adding weekly doses of Calcium nitrate, Genovis mega B complex, Betadine, Iron chelate, Strontium and Trace elements from Aquasonic.

I was monitoring the Ph with a handheld electronic digital Ph meter with manual calibration and 0.1 sensitivity. I did experiment with kalkwasser but found this method too tricky and sometimes even dangerous with negative results. The use of pool grade sodium carbonate and bicarbonate is a lot easier for Ph control and has no bad effects on soft corals. However I would not recommend these chemicals for private tanks with hard corals and then prefer to use Seachem chemicals.

My nine years of aquarium installation and maintenance and 3 years of coral farming the hard way finally forced me to invent a better way of doing things and make my life and the life of many future reef hobbyist a lot easier.

In 1998 I lodged a patent application for the Ezyclean aquarium system, made many and always improved prototypes till I finally got it completely right now, and in combination with my new improved DIY Jaubert NNR filter refuge system and a DIY inexpensive highly efficient PVC counter current protein skimmer the EZYREEF system was born and should hopefully soon be available on the WA market if my reoccurring eye problems finally stop.

Diagrams of the DIY protein skimmer and Jaubert filter/refuge will be available to all interested hobbyist in the very near future and later also a DIY pvc calcium reactor and chemical CO2 distribution system.

In short my conclusion would be that the marine and reef aquarium Trade is relying on and pushing too many high tech and very expensive systems for the inexperienced and confused hobbyist to choose from, while reef keeping is not at all that difficult and mysterious and can be done with some basic inexpensive but highly efficient common sense equipment and a good book about the subject.

Phillipe Dor, Armadale, WA
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MASWA Message Board....

Final Call for 2003 MASWA Membership

Memberships for MASWA are now overdue for 2003! We will not be carrying unfinancial members for months at a time like in previous years. Membership dues cost \$24 for "standard membership" (includes partner, sibling or child etc) and \$12 for "associate/country membership" (for those not attending meetings). If your membership dues are not paid by this meeting you will be struck off the membership register and receive no more newsletters!

Meeting Venues WANTED!

If you would like to host a meeting, whether it is to show off your setup, or get a bunch of heads together to solve your problems, WE WANT YOU! Don't worry if your tank is only just beginning or you have an algae bloom, we have seen it all before and can help you if you need it. Please speak to any of the committee members if you would like to volunteer your home to us!!!! There are currently vacancies for meetings from June to November. Don't be scared, we don't bite (except maybe Tony!).

Free Talk at AQWA

AQWA will be the venue for the start of a series of FREE marine based talks in their function centre. The first talk will be titled

AQWA-rium Creations and will be presented by me (David Bloch!). The topic of discussion will be an overview and brief description of what's involved in setting up a marine aquarium. The talk will start at 7.00pm and will go for around an hour. Please feel free to come along as I will be mentioning MASWA and telling all the guests how helpful we all are! I also hope to have some MASWA brochures to hand out and would love to have some fellow members there to help me out.

Upgrade of Web Site

After a few years of stagnating, our web site has got to the stage where it is going to be upgraded. Terry, our web master, is eager to make some changes and would like ideas and articles from all our members. Our web site should be somewhere that will be a central point for gathering marine aquarium knowledge. To get there however we need your help. If you know of any good links or articles or have contributions of your own please call or email Terry on **0438 717 300** or newwave@auscyber.net.

Excursions Anyone?

Carrying on from the success of excursions held in previous years, MASWA is keen to get this exciting idea up and running again now that the warmth of summer has returned. If you have any ideas for a MASWA gathering be it for a night dive, a snorkel, a reef walk at low tide, trip to the museum or whatever it may be please speak up and make yourself heard. It doesn't even have to be fishy! A social gathering like a BBQ would be fine too.

Water Test Kits

The committee are planning to purchase some accurate water test kits for the use of our members. The idea is that members will be able to bring water samples to meetings and test it using our kits. We are only just in the process of deciding which kits to purchase so it is unlikely that we will have them available at this upcoming meeting. Please feel free to ask any of the committee members about this if you think that you would benefit from this service.

Buy, Sell and Swap....

REEF AQUARIUM AND CABINET

122cm X 75cm X 61cm black silicon aquarium with 2X overflow and 2X inlet holes on pine cabinet. Includes all plumbing, 50cm cube glass sump, downdraft protein skimmer (no pump), gravity feed water topup valve and hanging light hood (not including lights!).

\$850 ONO.

Contact David on:

email: fishnut@optusnet.com.au

mobile: 0412 079 886

METAL HALIDE CONTROL GEAR

Metal halide control gear for 150 watt light. Control gear only - does not include lighting plug and cord or bulb holder and bulb. The asking price **\$75 ONO**

Contact David on

email: fishnut@optusnet.com.au

mobile: 0412 079 886

CALCIUM REACTOR

Acrylic tube 200mm in diameter. Is not completed and needs to be finished off. Does not include pump. The asking price **\$50 ONO.**

Contact David on:

email: fishnut@optusnet.com.au

mobile: 0412 079 886

SCUBA EQUIPMENT

95CF aluminium cylinder (tested this month), medium BC (Paragon), 1st stage and occy (Paragon) and Suntto Favor dive computer/pressure gauge combo.

The asking price for the whole lot is **\$700 ONO.**

Contact David on:

email: fishnut@optusnet.com.au

mobile: 0412 079 886

METAL HALIDE GEAR

Metal halide control gear, lamp holder and reflector (including 400 W bulb). The asking price **\$165 ONO.**

Contact Carl on:

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