



Dive Policy Standards and Procedures 2026

Contents

1. Introduction	3
1.1 Definition of Diving Agencies	3
1.2 Definition of a Dive	3
2. Operation Wallacea Dive Standards	4
2.1 Maximum Dive Times	4
2.2 Maximum Depth	4
2.3 Tank Pressure Procedures and Requirements.....	4
2.4 Safety Stops.....	5
2.5 Surface Interval	5
2.6 Repetitive Diving	5
2.7 Flying After Diving.....	5
2.8 Exceeding Depth Limits.....	5
2.9 Supervision.....	6
2.10 PADI Training Courses.....	6
2.11 All Non-Training Dives and Snorkels.....	6
3. Operation Wallacea Dive Procedures	7
3.1 General Dive and Boat Procedures	7
3.2 Emergency Procedures	8
3.3 Missing Diver Procedures	8
3.4 Injured Diver Procedures	8
3.5 Boat Recall Procedures	9
3.6 Shore diving procedures	9
4. Dive Equipment Requirements.....	9
4.1 PADI Dive Training.....	9
4.2 Certified Divers / Science Staff	9
4.3 Equipment Use, Care and Management	10
5. Required Safety Equipment	11
6. Definitions of Roles and Responsibilities	12
6.1 Dive Operations Manager	12

6.2 Dive Instructors.....	12
6.3 Divemasters and Dive Leaders.....	13
6.4 Certified Divers and Science Staff.....	13
7. Insurance.....	13
8. Night Dive Specific Standards and Procedures	14
9. Creation of Diving Standards and Contact	14

1. Introduction

Diving at Operation Wallacea sites takes place in remote environments, some with limited access to decompression facilities and emergency medical services (EMS). To minimise risk, it is critical that safety is the primary factor in dive planning during any courses, science dives and recreational dives. The minimum standards governing this policy are at least that of the PADI standards and general procedures, and this is for all Operation Wallacea sites. The standards and procedures at some of the sites are more stringent to take account of the remoteness to EMS and hyperbaric facilities.

Dive Operations Managers: please bear in mind that this document also covers the safety standards and procedures that must be followed for those volunteers snorkelling at an Operation Wallacea site.

1.1 Definition of Diving Agencies

At the time of writing in 2025, Operation Wallacea runs diving projects in 6 different countries: Croatia, Indonesia, Honduras, Madagascar, Mexico and South Africa. Whilst of the majority of our sites operate through a PADI dive center, or through Opwall's own registered PADI dive center, Opwall also works with an SSI dive center in Madagascar, and an IRTDA dive center in Croatia.

All training courses and resultant qualifications gained by these agencies are equivalent of each other, as are all safety, medical and theoretical standards. This document will largely refer to Opwall operating as a PADI dive center, however it should be noted that when PADI is mentioned, it is interchangeable with SSI and IRTDA.

1.2 Definition of a Dive

An open water dive is defined as a dive below 5m / 15ft for any length of time. A dive to less than 5m can also be considered an open water dive if the duration of the dive is longer than 20 minutes, or if the divers breathe more than 70 bar.

Confined water dives are defined as not submerging below 5m / 15ft. A deep dive is defined as being below 18m/60ft for any length of time.

Free diving is a specialized form of diving with no breathing apparatus. This requires specific training and briefings and is only undertaken at Operation Wallacea sites under strict supervision and under certain circumstances. Freediving is not allowed to be undertaken by students who are participating in SCUBA diving activities on the same day.

Skin diving is a suitable activity for those volunteers undertaking the Reef Ecology Course by snorkelling. Divemasters are qualified to put snorkellers through the PADI Skin Diver Course independently of a PADI Instructor. Therefore, snorkellers should complete the course where necessary prior to any practical work incorporated within the reef ecology course or before entering the water, if the reef ecology course is not being undertaken.

2. Operation Wallacea Dive Standards

The following standards are applicable to all diving undertaken with Operation Wallacea.

2.1 Maximum Dive Times

The maximum dive time (total time submerged) for all open water dives is 50 minutes. This is including the time it takes to complete a safety stop and then reach the surface. A safety stop of at least 3 minutes at a depth of 5m is required on all dives with Operation Wallacea. This is a more conservative than the PADI RDP due to the remote nature of our diving. Therefore, the maximum dive time of 50 minutes would equate to approximately 44 minutes bottom time before ascending to 5m to begin a safety stop. No maximum dive time is to come within 3 pressure groups of the NDL on the RDP table or 5 minutes on the NDL on any computer. The only exception to the maximum dive time is when diving within the definitions of a confined dive, in which case, the dive time is not limited.

An additional profile can be used during PADI/SSI/IRTDA Open Water training dives. This profile has an extended dive time of 60 minutes. This time allows up to 54 minutes bottom time before beginning to ascend to your safety stop. This allows additional bottom time to complete skills during Open Water training, however, cannot be used for any other dives. See below for maximum depth limits relating to this specific profile.

2.2 Maximum Depth

The maximum depth for a PADI Scuba Diver is 12m. For all certified divers, the maximum depth is 18m/60ft. The only exception to this is for the Advanced Open Water deep dive, where the maximum depth is increased to 30m/100ft. The maximum depth for a confined dive is 5m; anything below this depth must be classed as an open water dive.

With regards the profile for PADI Open Water extended dive times outlined above (see 2.1), the maximum depth for this dive is 10m/33ft. This dive must be approved by the Dive Operations Manager, as it can only be used at times where it will not have a detrimental effect on other scheduled dives.

Commented [JM1]: Does this need to be extended to include any data collection dives?

2.3 Tank Pressure Procedures and Requirements

All divers entering the water for open water dives must have sufficient starting pressure to complete a 50 minute dive to 18m/60ft, and dive staff are expected to check starting pressure for all divers under their supervision prior to entering the water. Our optimal minimum starting pressure is 180bar/2700psi. Divers should inform their dive professional when they reach 100bar/1500psi and must begin their ascent with a minimum of 60bar/1000psi. All divers for both confined and open water dives must be on the surface with no less than 50bar/900psi. Whilst PADI Professionals will monitor air consumption wherever possible, all qualified divers are responsible for monitoring their own air consumption and communicating this with their dive leaders as necessary.

Commented [JM2]: Changed to 60 bar

2.4 Safety Stops

A safety stop at 5m for a minimum of 3 minutes (5 minutes preferred) must be performed prior to surfacing from all open water dives. Exceptions to this include missing diver procedures and emergency recalls as stated in the emergency procedures.

2.5 Surface Interval

A surface interval which ensures all divers enter the water in pressure group A (according to the PADI RDP) must be adhered to at all times. Where logistically possible a 3 hour surface interval will be employed, which guarantees an ending pressure group of A.

2.6 Repetitive Diving

The maximum number of open water dives is four per day for PADI Professionals and science staff with the agreement of the Dive Operations Manager, and two dives per day for students and volunteers, with the exception of when additional courses (for example PADI Advanced Open Water) are being led by an instructor; this is at the discretion of the Dive Operations Manager. The maximum number of consecutive diving days is six. After this a compulsory 24-hour de-gas period must be undertaken.

2.7 Flying After Diving

Operation Wallacea's flying after diving regulations are to be in line with the current PADI recommendation, which states the following:

- Single dives - A minimum pre-flight surface interval of 12 hours is suggested.
- Repetitive dives and/or multi-day dives - A minimum pre-flight surface interval of 18 hours is suggested.

2.8 Exceeding Depth Limits

If a diver exceeds their planned or agreed depth limits, then they should ascend to within their depth limits and continue with the dive. A verbal warning will then be issued by the Dive Operations Manager, and at their discretion, may also include the offender missing the next planned dive. Whilst discipline for exceeding limits is at the Dive Operations Manager's discretion, continued exceeding of limits may result in the diver being made to re-do areas of their dive training such as peak performance buoyancy, to ensure that their dive skills are up to standard.

In the event of limits being severely exceeded, the dive may be aborted at the discretion of the dive leader, in which case the buddy team must abort the dive by ascending at a safe rate of no more than 18m/60ft per minute up to a depth of 5m where a 5 minute safety stop will then be completed before ascending to the surface. No dive is to come within 3 pressure groups of the NDL on the RDP table or 5 minutes on the NDL on a computer.

2.9 Supervision

At least one member of dive staff (PADI Professional or equivalent) must be present on all boats where students or staff are taking part in in-water activities.

Operation Wallacea dive standards are more conservative than those of PADI. We have set our standards to incorporate the safest student to staff ratios feasible for the organizations with whom we work with and the conditions under which we dive.

Where feasible, an additional dive professional will be employed to cover any unexpected illness within our professional team. If, however, unforeseen circumstances do arise, Operation Wallacea reserves the right to revert back to PADI standards on supervising divers. This will be a decision made by the Operation Wallacea representative on site based on the advice of the Dive Operations Manager.

2.10 PADI Training Courses

All PADI training courses are to be in-water supervised by a qualified and registered PADI instructor. In cases of 5 or more students, the instructor must be assisted by a PADI divemaster. For 4 students or less, no divemaster is required. The maximum ratio is 8 students to each Instructor + divemaster pairing. The maximum ratio is 4 students when only an instructor is present. These maximum ratios may be reduced depending on site and conditions.

2.11 All Non-Training Dives and Snorkels

All dives, snorkels and in water activities are to be led and supervised by a dive professional. The maximum ratio for participants to dive professionals is 6:1. For snorkelling, the maximum ratio of volunteers to snorkel leaders is 8:1. Snorkel leaders must be a certified PADI Rescue Diver or above (or possess a suitable lifeguarding qualification). Dependent on conditions, snorkel leaders may choose out of water supervision as the most effective form of supervision for snorkellers, for example, shore or boat cover. However, this must first be approved by the Dive Operations Manager.

All certified divers and snorkellers must be always in buddy teams (of two) during in water activities. All buddy teams must stay in close contact at all times, where it should take no more than a couple of seconds to reach your buddy. Teams of snorkellers in areas where there is boat traffic must carry a surface marker buoy (SMB) with them so that they are clearly visible.

Dive professionals may dive in a buddy team of three in accordance with PADI regulations, as at no point are divers allowed to dive solo.

Neither divemaster trainees nor contracted science staff are included as students in the supervision ratios. Divemaster trainees must not be used as PADI professionals in the ratios at any time. However, if a member of science staff collecting their own data, who is also a renewed PADI professional, has three or less students under their direct supervision, they may act as both a scientist and a PADI professional in these circumstances.

3. Operation Wallacea Dive Procedures

All diving with Operation Wallacea is to be done within the Operation Wallacea dive standards stated above, and must be in line with PADI standards and procedures. Where diving outside of recreational limits takes place at Operation Wallacea expedition sites, this is restricted to appropriately qualified divers who are not Operation Wallacea volunteers, and who accept responsibility during these activities. All divers participating in such activities require their own suitable diving insurance and risk assessment, and non-recreational diving takes place at the discretion of the Dive Operations Manager and other senior site management. Operation Wallacea provide on-site and logistical support only.

3.1 General Dive and Boat Procedures

It is the responsibility of the boat leaders to complete a roster slate before departure. The date, departure time, destination and names of all the divers and snorkellers on the boat, together with their starting air pressure should be recorded on the slate; this slate must be handed into the diving base (e.g. person on radio duty) or boat where diving takes place from a liveaboard or full day trip.

Once on the boat the Boat Leader must ensure the required safety equipment is on board and all divers have required safety equipment. The Boat Leader or Captain must ensure working communication with the base or local authorities exists (e.g. perform an initial radio check before leaving site).

On arrival at the dive site, the Boat Leader should make a visual assessment of the site to be dived. The boat leader will then brief the divers on the key features of the dive site, any potential hazards, the duration and profile of the dive (max depth; max dive time; safety stop; minimum return tank pressure; recall signal and other underwater signals).

Prior to any divers entering the water, a second communication check will be completed, confirming contact with base. At sites where mobile phone signal exists at dive sites, a battery and signal check will suffice, but where radio communication is used, a full communication check must be carried out.

If the dive site chosen is unsuitable for diving that day (e.g. strong currents, high winds), the dive leader will abort the dive at that site and proceed to an alternative site after informing the base of the change in plan. The boat leader will then assign buddy teams, check that each buddy team has completed their buddy check, and ensure that the details of the air pressure of each diver prior to entry is noted on the slate boat roster. Please note that whilst the boat leader will remind divers to complete a buddy check, all qualified divers are responsible for completing their own buddy checks, and communicating that to the boat leader.

During the period when the divers are underwater, the boat captain must remain alert and watch the surface for divers.

Divers are to ascend slowly and safely from each dive. The ascent rate for all divers is as per the PADI standard rate of a maximum 18m/60ft per minute. The ascent to the surface should only begin after completion of the required safety stop at 5m. If a diver fails to return to the vicinity of the boat by the time of the ascent an SMB is to be deployed during the safety stop to allow the boat to locate the divers prior to surfacing.

The boat captain will help the divers aboard the boat upon surfacing.

Once all divers are on board, the dive leader must note the remaining air pressure, maximum depth and dive time for each diver and record the information on the roster slate.

On return to base; the roster is handed into the radio room for the information to be written up onto a paper copy.

3.2 Emergency Procedures

All staff are to be briefed on emergency procedures. Copies of the Operation Wallacea risk assessments, emergency action plans and evacuation procedures are to be available to staff throughout the season.

3.3 Missing Diver Procedures

If a diver loses sight of their buddy, they must stay where they are and search for no longer than one minute in the immediate area before ascending to the surface at a safe rate (maximum 18m/60ft per minute) omitting the safety stop only if they have remained within Operation Wallacea's diving standards. The diver should then reunite with their buddy on the surface. If the diver has dived outside of the recommended profile, they must complete necessary safety stops according to PADI's Recreational Dive Planner or their dive computer, with a minimum of a 3 minute safety stop at 5m. If the diver is still unable to locate their buddy, they must immediately signal to the boat who will recall all divers/ snorkellers from the water using recall methods stated in 3.5.

3.4 Injured Diver Procedures

If you or your buddy seem to be injured, alert your dive leader. They will then assess the possible injury. If the injury is deemed to need medical assistance, or the injury victim is not comfortable to complete the rest of the dive then the dive may be aborted. Injured divers are to be brought to the surface at the safe maximum ascent rate of 18m/60ft per minute. If they have dived within Operation Wallacea standards then the safety stop may be omitted, if however, either the victim or rescuer, have dived outside of the profile they must complete necessary safety stops according to RDP regulations, providing their injuries mean adhering to the safety stop does not put them under additional risk. On reaching the surface, the rescuing diver is to alert the dive boat by using visual or audible safety signal.

3.5 Boat Recall Procedures

If at any point during the dive the boat needs to recall all divers and snorkelers, the recall system will be three long revs of the engine followed by a pause and another three long revs or continuous banging of metal on metal, they should ascend at the safe rate of 18m/60ft per minute having deployed an SMB at 5m. If the dive has remained within Operation Wallacea standards, they must omit the safety stop and return directly to the surface. If the diver has dived outside of the profile, they must complete the necessary safety stops as advised by the RDP. All divers and snorkelers should pay special attention to the boat briefing as recall procedures may differ each day between locations and conditions.

3.6 Shore diving procedures

On Operation Wallacea sites where shore diving is permitted, special care and procedures must be observed. In the same way that a Boat Leader must assess the conditions, dive site and conduct briefings, so must the Dive Leaders of a shore dive. Extra attention must be paid to entry and exit points.

Missing diver procedures and injured diver procedures remain the same as with boat diving.

Shore diving emergency recall procedures however will differ from site to site. Where a boat recall usually relies on revving an engine or banging on metal, these may not be an option for a shore dive. This means that shore diving emergency recall procedures must be agreed by the dive operations manager and dive staff prior to the beginning of the diving season.

4. Dive Equipment Requirements

4.1 PADI Dive Training

All students taking part in PADI dive training must have all equipment and required materials as stated in the PADI standards. All PADI professionals teaching / assisting with PADI training must also have the required materials and equipment as stated in the course standards.

4.2 Certified Divers / Science Staff

All certified divers are responsible for diving within Operation Wallacea standards therefore must have the following monitoring devices;

1. Depth gauge*
2. Submersible pressure gauge (SPG)
3. Timing device

**If an individual depth gauge is not available, then all Operation Wallacea participants must adhere strictly to the instructions of their dive leader. They must never go deeper than the dive leader and must ascend at the same rate, constantly checking that they are doing so. Participants must stay at the same depth as the dive leader during the safety stop.*

Should the dive leader have to surface at any point during the dive (to help a student with a problem for example), then the entire group must also surface at a safe rate if a qualified professional with a depth gauge is not on hand to supervise.

Both dive computers and compasses are recommended, however Operation Wallacea do not set this as a compulsory requirement as all certified divers must dive with a dive professional.

All divers and snorkellers must wear appropriate protection from the temperature and environment; this is often dependent on site however long wetsuits are generally suitable; long wetsuits are compulsory in both of our Indonesian sites; Hoga Island and Bau Bau.

All dive professionals must carry one audible (whistle) and one visual (DSMB) safety-signalling device. It is recommended that certified divers diving with a professional should also have at least an audible or visual signalling device.

Groups of snorkellers should always carry an SMB to signal their presence to boat traffic. There should be a minimum of one SMB per six snorkellers. Groups should still be divided into buddy teams, and all individuals must stay within 5m of each other and of the SMB.

4.3 Equipment Use, Care and Management

Operation Wallacea ensures that all SCUBA and snorkelling equipment is cleaned, maintained, inspected and serviced to at least the industry standard in the country of operation. This includes equipment used directly by participants (e.g. BCDs, regulators, tanks) but also supplementary equipment (e.g. air and gas compressors). Repairs to equipment will not interfere with the normal use or function of the equipment. Once equipment no longer functions appropriately or cannot be repaired to the above standard, it is retired from use.

4.3.1 SCUBA cylinders

All cylinders used on Operation Wallacea expeditions are maintained and serviced as per regional and international standards. In the case of dive cylinders this involves a visual inspection at least every year and a hydrostatic test at least every 5 years. Prior to expeditions, cylinder valves and O-rings are checked for safety issues. Any cylinders deemed unsafe or unclean will not be used on expedition by Operation Wallacea divers.

4.3.2 Compressors

Any compressor used for cylinder fills on marine sites should be maintained and serviced to ensure that optimum performance and safety standards can be met.

This includes the location of the compressor – must be in an area of clean, uncontaminated air. In addition to taking steps to prevent contamination, logs and checklists on the compressor are used to track essential functions and reliability. In addition to logging information about each fill, the date and type of service performed on the compressor must also be logged, the reason for the service, actions taken, parts replaced, the name of the technician and the date of the next planned service.

Compressor filters are checked and changed according to the log time and manufacturer's instructions.

4.3.3 Regulators & BCD's

All diving regulators used by Operation Wallacea participants are serviced and maintained according to manufacturers instructions. Individuals involved with the servicing of regulators and BCD's must have appropriate and relevant servicing training and experience and must follow manufacturers guidelines.

4.3.4 Masks and fins

Additional equipment such as masks and fins, when provided by Operation Wallacea or Operation Wallacea partners, must be of a high enough quality and condition to ensure that users can meet the performance requirements for specific activities. Masks and fins should be cleaned and maintained to ensure that optimum safety and performance standards are met.

5. Required Safety Equipment

In the case of shore diving, safety equipment should be easily accessible in the case of an emergency. Site-specific emergency procedures should be explained to each dive professional prior to any in-water activity from the shore and it must be ensured that the professionals are happy with how to use the equipment if the situation should arise. Equipment available at each site should include a minimum of:

1. Oxygen kit suitable for both breathing and non-breathing patient with sufficient oxygen supply to return to site.
2. First aid kit including hot water thermos and vinegar to deal with marine organism injuries.

Each dive boat must have the following equipment on board. It is the responsibility of the dive leader to check all equipment is on board prior to each dive. It is also the responsibility of the Dive Operations Manager to regularly check all equipment is in good working order.

1. Oxygen kit suitable for both breathing and non-breathing patient with sufficient oxygen supply to return to site.
2. First aid kit including hot water thermos and vinegar to deal with marine organism injuries.
3. A floatation device/life ring.
4. A radio for contact to base and other dive boats.
5. A fully completed dive roster detailing all volunteers, students and staff on the boat.

6. Definitions of Roles and Responsibilities

6.1 Dive Operations Manager

- It is the responsibility of the Dive Operations Manager to ensure that all dives and in water activities are scheduled and planned, ensuring that staffing ratios meet Operation Wallacea and PADI requirements.
- Ensure that student record files are completed accurately and kept for all student divers.
- Ensure that all certified divers have shown their certification card or have been checked online.
- Ensure that all PADI forms for student divers; certified divers and PADI professionals are correctly completed before any in water activities.
- The Dive Operations Manager must ensure that all PADI training courses meet PADI requirements.
- Ensure that all non-training dives, snorkels and in-water activities meet Operation Wallacea's standards
- A hard copy of all dive rosters must be reviewed and a record kept
- All dive professionals, students, volunteers and visitors must be fully briefed on Operation Wallacea dive standards and procedures prior to any in-water activities.
- Ensure that all divers (including PADI professionals) undertake a check dive prior to any other dive activity. The exception to this being PADI open water students.
- Overseeing the care and maintenance of all dive equipment including boats, compressors, dive equipment and safety equipment.
- All other duties and responsibilities as stated in individual contracts.

Note: On sites where Operation Wallacea does not employ a dive operations manager, it is the responsibility of the site manager to ensure the above roles and responsibilities are understood and delegated. These roles can be performed by Operation Wallacea staff members and partner dive center managers/instructors.

6.2 Dive Instructors

- It is the dive instructor's duty to carry out dive training as required of them by the Dive Operations Manager.
- It is the dive instructor's responsibility to ensure all training is done within PADI and Operation Wallacea standards.
- Ensure that student record files are accurately completed and kept for all student divers.
- Ensure that all PADI forms for are correctly completed before any in-water activities and that all students meet the requirements for their course.
- Any other duties and responsibilities as stated in individual contracts.

6.3 Divemasters and Dive Leaders

Dive leaders are defined as a PADI divemaster or above, or in the case of local staff in Cuba, an alternative certifying agency to PADI (such as, but not limited to: SSI dive leader, ACUC divemasters, or CMAS Four Star Rating or higher), who have been assigned to lead and supervise in water activities. Their roles are as follows:

- Ensure that all diving is done within Operation Wallacea dive standards and PADI Standards and procedures.
- Have knowledge of Operation Wallacea Emergency Action Plans (EAPs).
- Plan the dives / snorkels as directed by the Dive Operations Manager, including assigning buddy pairs.
- Brief all divers and snorkellers prior to any in-water activities.
- Ensure that buddy checks are carried out and each diver carries with them the required safety equipment.
- Check that all dive procedures are met including completed dive roster forms, radio checks etc.
- When supervising boat dives and snorkels ensure that all necessary medical and safety equipment is on board.
- It is the dive leader's responsibility to carry out all duties, which are required of them by the Dive Operations Manager and their individual contracts.

6.4 Certified Divers and Science Staff

- It is the responsibility of all certified divers to ensure that they follow all Operation Wallacea dive standards and procedures, and that all dives are performed within PADI standards.
- Certified divers must listen carefully to dive briefings and follow instructions of the dive leader.
- Certified divers must be fully aware of all emergency procedures and recall systems.
- All divers must carry out buddy checks prior to each dive.
- It is the responsibility of all divers to ensure that their equipment is in safe working order and that they have all the required safety equipment.

7. Insurance

All Dive Professionals are to have professional liability insurance as required by PADI and stated in Operation Wallacea diver contract. All students & volunteers must purchase travel insurance that will cover themselves for participating in SCUBA diving activities (or snorkelling if you are not diving).

8. Night Dive/Snorkel Specific Standards and Procedures

Night dives are to be undertaken only by PADI Advanced Open Water Divers (or equivalent) and above. The exception to this is when a night dive is completed as part of the Advanced Open Water course or as an individual Adventure Dive under PADI standards.

Profile: the maximum depth for a night dive is 14m/45ft. The maximum dive time remains 50 minutes (40 minutes on Hoga Island) including the 5 minute safety stop at 5m. All divers must enter the water at pressure group A or be completely off gassed.

Supervision: the supervision levels remain the same as stated in the general standards and procedures.

Equipment: Each diver must have at least one main dive light, between the buddy pair there must also be a backup dive light. A glow tube or cyalume stick should be attached to the tank valve of each diver.

Dive Boat: The dive boat must remain moored in a stationary position, the mooring line / shot line is to be marked with a strobe at the surface to indicate the boats' location, a glow tube should be placed at 5m to indicate position for Safety stop, a third tube is also placed at 10mtrs. Throughout the dive boat crew should remain on the surface and alert for surfacing divers. Each boat should carry equipment as stated in the general standards, and carry a dive light, as well as a dive light suitable for a surface search.

Night Snorkels: Must be completed with a ratio of 4:1. Each participant and the snorkel leader must have a torch and the snorkel leader must carry a buoy. An appropriate briefing must take place.

9. Creation of Diving Standards and Contact

Our diving standards are reviewed on an annual basis by our in-house diving team who manage operations of our marine sites globally. James Muir acts as the dive operations manager for Operation Wallacea. James is PADI MSDT qualified and has a high working knowledge of diving industry standards. For any SCUBA / snorkelling related queries you can contact them and the diving team at diving@opwall.com

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