

# BYRON UNDERWATER FESTIVAL 2009

> PERFECT WEATHER, GREAT VIZ AND RECORD CROWDS

: TIM HOCHGREBE

The 3rd Byron Underwater Festival was again a massive success. Despite tough economic times, participation numbers were up 40% from last years records with close to 80 people participating in this years photo and video shoot-out competition competing for close to \$40,000 in prizes. To our knowledge this has now become the largest underwater shoot-out competition in the Australasia region.

The prizes won included cameras, underwater housings, dive gear and dive trips to Fiji and Indonesia. Biggest winners were Ballina resident Mark Gray who scored both overseas trips for the winning image in the SLR camera category as well as 2nd prize in the Underwater Portfolio. Yamba resident Chis Hamilton won 1st prize in the portfolio category and a dive gear package worth more than \$5000. In the video category Kieren Curry from the Gold Coast won some highly valued video lights with his excellent narrated video entry. Compact category winner Dave Bryant from Melbourne won a digital SLR housing to move his photography to the next level.

Two local school groups went out with sponsor cameras to take underwater photos for the first time and had whole school projects devoted to this.

The Marine Visions III open medium art competition held as part of the Underwater Festival in conjunction with Retrospect Galleries saw many excellent entries including sculptures, photographs and some amazing fine art. Doves of people attended the launch event on Friday and it was pushing room only to get close to the works.

Winner of the fine art prize was Steven Giese with his work "Spell for the Protection against Sharks". Some works can still be seen at Retrospect Galleries this week. Part of this year's Byron Underwater Festival was also the world premiere screening of the 2nd instalment of David Hannan's best-selling film 'Coral Sea Dreaming' - fully shot in High Definition. The night was a sell-out and the personal introduction to the film by



world renowned underwater cinematographer David Hannan himself made the screening a huge success. The film will be released on DVD and BlueRay later this year.

Other highlights of the festival were the underwater photography clinics by Mathieu Meur, who flew in for this festival all the way from Singapore. His clinics were sold out quickly and participants were putting their new learned skills to test immediately. Mathieu who authored 3 books on digital underwater photography also gave a free public lecture at the Byron Bay Community Centre during the week.

Guest of honour for last 3 years, Australia's own underwater pioneer Neville Coleman was back this year to give public lectures and to conduct an 'Underwater Naturalist' course, which was a great success. Neville is the author of over 60 books and well known for his passion for the underwater world and the small and unusual critters it contains. Listening to him talk about his



many decades of exploration is an inspiration and for those who managed to meet him during the festival will realise what an amazing person he is.

The Byron Underwater Festival is an annual event and not just for divers. Aimed at everyone wanting to experience our marine environment for themselves it encourages all to participate - whether you want to learn more about it, dive it, snorkel it, kayak it or even paint it. Only one year to go to the next one ...

For more info on this annual event visit

> [LINK www.underwaterfestival.com.au](http://www.underwaterfestival.com.au)

## > BYRON UNDERWATER FESTIVAL WINNERS GALLERY 2009

### Best Festival Photograph - SLR camera

- **1st prize** - Mark Gray - a dive holiday for TWO at Matava in Fiji - Leopard Shark *Stegostoma fasciatum* (A)
- **2nd prize** - Chris Hamilton - 10 dive voucher at Sundive Byron Bay inc gear hire if needed PLUS a \$500 Ultra Light Control Systems voucher from Scubapix
- **3rd prize** - Graham Midgley - a massive 1200mm x 800mm canvas print of your winning image by Retrospect

### Best Festival Portfolio

- **1st prize** - Chris Hamilton - Full Beuchat SCUBA package including first and second stage regulators, occy & BCD as well as fins & mask. (B)
- **2nd prize** - Mark Gray - 6 Days/5 Nights Cocotinos Dive Package for one diver in Manado, Sulawesi. PLUS a \$500 Aquatica voucher from Scubapix
- **3rd prize** - Stefan Beekman - aunoc 3TEN Dive Light

### Best Festival Videos

- **1st prize** - Kieren Curry - Light & Motion LED Sunray-1000 Video light.
- **2nd prize** - Josh Jensen - Beuchat full wetsuit PLUS a \$500 Gates voucher from Scubapix
- **3rd prize** - Jorina van der Westhuizen - Pair of ESCLAPEZ Fins

### Best Festival Photograph - Compact camera

- **1st prize** - David Bryant - Choice of Ikelite SLR housing (inc port) / video housing or DS-160 deluxe strobe package (C)
- **2nd prize** - Stefan Beekman - 3 night/4 dive Dive/Accommodation package at PLANULA Divers Retreat/Byron Bay Dive Centre for TWO PEOPLE
- **3rd prize** - Ken Thongpila - a huge 900mm x 600mm canvas print of your winning image by Retrospect

### Best Festival Photograph - Novice & Sealife Camera Try Outs

- **1st prize** - Susan Berry - Sealife DC800 camera (D)
- **2nd prize** - Aiden Dipple - Pair of ESCLAPEZ Fins
- **3rd prize** - Cherie Dodd - Essential & Advanced Guide to Underwater Photography

### Neville Coleman Awards - most interesting critter find during the Underwater Festival

4 prizes of autographed copies of Neville Coleman's latest books (E)

- **1st prize** John Natoli
- **2nd prize** John Natoli
- **3rd prize** Ian Banks
- **4th prize** Ken Thongpila