



For immediate release

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**AltaSea at the Port of Los Angeles, Reef Check and Los Angeles Maritime Institute
Announce “Student Ocean Scientist” Program to
Engage Youth in Ocean-Based Learning**

*Educational collaboration focused on teaching middle school children how to carry out
scientific investigations of the Los Angeles Harbor and coastal waters*

(Los Angeles, CA) – March 7, 2016. AltaSea at the Port of Los Angeles, Reef Check and the Los Angeles Maritime Institute (LAMI) announced a collaborative partnership to engage youth in marine conservation through a highly interactive Student Ocean Scientist Program (SOS). The acronym reflects the urgent need to address threats to marine life locally and globally, and is designed to raise awareness about the value of ocean resources, threats to ocean health and solutions to those problems.

“We’re excited to bring together organizations with decades of experience in ocean exploration and experiential education,” said Jenny Krusoe, Executive Director of AltaSea, which facilitated the connection between Reef Check and LAMI. “This partnership aligns perfectly with AltaSea’s efforts to ignite passion and commitment through educational programs that immerse children and adults in the critical role that the ocean has on our planet.”

For the pilot phase, the STEM-based program will focus on Title I middle schools located in Los Angeles County on a first-come, first-served basis. During each three-hour program, students are introduced to the local marine ecosystem in the Los Angeles Harbor aboard one of LAMI’s two tall ships, the *Irving Johnson* and *Exy Johnson*. These 110-foot traditionally rigged vessels were “purpose built” for youth education at sea. In

addition to offering a close-up look at marine life, students become part of a working sailboat crew and learn the importance of teamwork.

Sails have already taken place with students from Lennox Middle School, Dana Middle School and Emerson Middle School, with a total of 21 sails planned through June 2016.

“This is a natural expansion for our TopSail Youth Program,” stated Bruce Heyman, Executive Director of Los Angeles Maritime Institute (LAMI). “We’re elated to partner with AltaSea and Reef Check to bring more science-based programming to our schools and community, and ultimately, challenging students to think about solutions to environmental impacts on our local waters.”

Reef Check uses “citizen science” to engage local communities in marine conservation. At the start of the SOS program, students are asked to answer a simple question: *Why is the ocean valuable?* This discussion leads to a hands-on scientific investigation where students will analyze and interpret data collected in the ocean to explain how human impacts play a key role in the health of the ocean and why ocean conservation is critical to our own survival.

“It is shocking that more than 50% of LA County students have never put their toes in the ocean, many do not know how to swim and know little about marine life,” expressed Dr. Gregor Hodgson, Founder & Executive Director of Reef Check Foundation. “By learning to sail a real brigantine sailboat and observing living marine organisms like John Steinbeck did, we hope that SOS students will make an emotional connection with the ocean. Our goal is for students to become ocean ambassadors in their schools and communities.”

The partnership among AltaSea, Reef Check and Los Angeles Maritime Institute gives students the opportunity to become marine biologists for the day, to experiment, test water for pollution, and to observe fish, invertebrates and live plankton swimming under a microscope. “We hope that some students will eventually enter our advanced marine science training courses to become Reef Check EcoDivers, and join our annual underwater survey of the entire California coast,” said Hodgson.

Upon students’ arrival at the waterfront, they receive a packet of illustrated marine science cards to guide their scientific investigation aboard the tall ships. To assist teachers, the SOS program includes classroom and field units designed to support California’s Next Generation Science Standards, and pre- and post-program knowledge testing. Students learn about ocean ecosystems, oceanography of waves and currents, and ocean conservation while sailing on a brigantine similar to those used by 19th century explorers.

This educational collaboration seeks to create a new generation of young people who will spread their appreciation for the value of the ocean, for marine life and all of us.

About AltaSea at the Port of Los Angeles

AltaSea at the Port of Los Angeles accelerates scientific collaboration, facilitates job creation and inspires the next generation for a more sustainable ocean. Built on a historic pier with access to the deep ocean, AltaSea's 35-acre campus brings people together to expand science-based understanding of the ocean; incubate and sustain ocean-related business; and pioneer new ocean-related education programs. For more information, please visit www.altasea.org.

About Reef Check Foundation

Founded in 1996 by former UCLA professor of marine biology Dr. Gregor Hodgson, the Reef Check Foundation headquartered in Marina Del Rey, is an international nonprofit organization dedicated to the conservation of two ecosystems: tropical coral reefs and California rocky reefs. Reef Check operates the only global coral reef monitoring program carried out by trained teams of volunteer citizen scientists in more than 90 countries and territories, and a second program devoted to annual monitoring of over 80 reefs and marine protected areas along the entire coast of California. www.reefcheck.org

About Los Angeles Maritime Institute

Since its inception, Los Angeles Maritime Institute (LAMI) has served over 60,000 young people throughout Los Angeles County with transformational experiences at sea. Founded in 1992 by sailor and retired science teacher, Jim Gladson, the award-winning TopSail Youth Program introduces at-risk and disadvantaged youth to a world beyond their communities where they are provided with real-life challenges not available in the traditional classroom. LAMI's unique educational approach fosters students' interest in continuing their education, particularly in STEM-related subjects, while opening doors of opportunity for global maritime careers. The hands-on program is offered year-round aboard the twin brigantines *Irving Johnson* and *Exy Johnson*, 110-foot traditionally rigged wooden vessels built on the LA Waterfront between 2000 and 2002. The purpose-built vessels and their crews were proclaimed the "Official Tall Ships and Maritime Ambassadors of the City of Los Angeles" by city resolution at their launch. They are the only twin brigantines in the world. www.lamitopsail.org

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