

Jo's back in at the deep end to save Caribbean coral reefs

It's oceans apart from helping Scottish businesses improve their environmental management.

Edinburgh woman Jo Paulson is heading to the Caribbean later this year to lead an expedition aimed at fighting the threat to coral reefs off the island of Tobago.

As Communications Manager for the Midlothian-based Business Environment Partnership (BEP), the 28-year-old from Newington spearheaded a drive which signed up 200 members for the organisation which provides free and subsidised environmental assistance for small and medium-sized companies throughout Scotland.

BEP has given her a six-month sabbatical to lead Coral Cay Conservation's Tobago Marine expedition between November and next April. Tobago's coral reefs are being threatened by both global and local impacts.

"The project looks at the abundance and health of coral reef and fish species in order to direct management plans for the island's fragile marine resources," said Jo who worked on a similar project in Mexico two years ago. "I'll be looking after the volunteers, running the project site and getting involved with community engagement and education activities."

Coral are highly sensitive to environmental change so are often the first to show signs of stress, for example when sea temperatures rise, she explained. Some 20% of the world's coral reefs have been lost already and it is estimated another 45% will disappear in the next 40 years.

Coral Cay Conservation, which specialises in looking after coral reefs and tropical forests, is now conducting a systematic study of the area, collecting information on the status of Tobago's coral reefs, seagrass beds and mangrove forests. This baseline data will be used to develop habitat maps which outline areas of high biodiversity and reef resilience.

Jo added: "It's important that we monitor the impacts that things like sea temperatures and tourism have on coral in different areas and use this information to direct a management approach to protect the reefs."

Gregor Murray, Executive Director of the Business Environment Partnership, commented: "We enthusiastically back Jo's efforts. Her project fits in with BEP's ethos of protecting our natural environment and securing long-term sustainable

practices.”

In July Jo was named one of Scotland’s most creative young entrepreneurs for her work with BEP. She was one of six finalists in the Scottish heat of the Junior Chamber International (JCI) Creative Young Entrepreneur awards which recognise outstanding entrepreneurs between the ages of 18 and 40.