

CORAL CURRENT

The Newsletter of The Coral Reef Alliance



Working Together to
Keep Coral Reefs Alive

SAVING RAJA AMPAT

Mining and Fishing Threaten Raja's Reefs— Can Tourism Fees Help Protect Them?

Overwhelmingly beautiful. Cruising the crystal waters of Raja Ampat, Indonesia, Helen Newman—CORAL's Indonesian Field Representative—admits it's easy to be overwhelmed by its beauty. It's like no other place on earth. Verdant but miniature mountains explode out of opal blue waters. New species are constantly being discovered.

Raja Ampat is one of the most biodiverse areas on the planet. As with the rest of Indonesia, this beauty is accompanied by great poverty—poverty that threatens Raja Ampat's reefs.

Newman explains that, "the govern-

Raja Ampat currently sells commercial fishing and mining rights that could destroy its marine and terrestrial habitats. CORAL and its partners are helping Raja Ampat discover alternative and sustainable forms of revenue, like tourism fees. For maps and facts about Raja Ampat see www.coral.org/whatewedo/wherewework/rajaampat.



ment is under pressure to provide for its people. It is easy to see why they consider selling commercial mining and fishing rights. It's a quick and relatively easy way to fuel the economy. Unfortunately, it isn't sustainable. Selling these rights now could kill a large percentage of this reef in just a few years. Large commercial fishing fleets threaten to collapse local fisheries. Sedimentation from mining runoff smothers reefs. We need to convince the government of a more sustainable way. We need to do it now."

Financing for the Future of Raja Ampat

CORAL and its partners are working to increase Raja Ampat's economic options while saving reefs, beginning with tourism fees.

Tourism fees—fees that a visitor pays to enjoy entry to a specific nature area—will be collected for Raja Ampat's marine protected areas through the sale of visitor tags.

Previously, Raja Ampat tried to introduce a tourism fee of approximately US \$20. However, some of the local communities never received their share. In addition, the creators of the previous fee system didn't follow legal protocol for putting the fee requirements into law. As Newman states, "...the previous system was neither legal nor transparent."

Trouble in Paradise

As a result of never having received

the expected tourism fee money due, some villagers took matters into their own hands. They charged visitors and dive operators directly for using their reef. In most cases this was done reasonably, but in a few areas it got out of hand. Some villagers reportedly asked for disproportionate amounts of money from dive operators, providing different excuses for payment each time. One alleged attempt asked for US \$2,000 in "back payments."

CORAL Solutions

To make the new fee system work, CORAL knew that it had to be restructured completely. Consensus from all stakeholders was crucial.

In March and April of this year, CORAL not only held trainings for dive operators and tourism board members, but also reached out to local communities in creating a new vision for the tourism fees. The Bupati (District Head) has (cont'd pg. 2)

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CORAL Publishes World's First Regional Sustainable Marine Recreation Standards

Standards done right

CORAL, the International Coral Reef Action Network, and the marine recreation industry in Mesoamerica are celebrating the publication of the first-ever regional standards for sustainable marine recreation.

As this ground-breaking step toward protecting the Mesoamerican Barrier Reef rolls out this summer, scores of scuba and marine recreation businesses are gearing up to improve their operations.

Dive, snorkel, and boat businesses contracting with the cruise line industry in Cozumel have opened their doors to a CORAL assessment of their environmental performance.

Using the standards, CORAL will evaluate the environmental and safety aspects of their business practices. A list of recommendations and trainings to help companies to improve their operations will follow.

Sustainable business standards reduce recreational overuse and misuse of reefs. The standards also increase coral's resistance to other stressors, such as pollution, disease, and overfishing.

As testing and adoption moves to Guatemala, Belize, and Honduras, the tourism industry throughout the Mesoamerican Reef will become a true partner in conservation.

SAVING RAJA AMPAT (continued from cover)

preliminarily approved this proposal and will vote on the proposal's official law status as early as July 2007.

The proposal includes a Bupati-appointed committee comprising all stakeholders, including representatives from the local community, tourism bureau, Bupati office, fisheries, dive operators, traditional religious leaders, and local non-profit organizations. The proposal also ensures that the local community receives a fair share of the proceeds.

Rick MacPherson, CORAL Program Director, states, "CORAL knows from experience that marine protected areas need sustainable financing to succeed. They also need community support. I am excited to see this momentum in Raja Ampat. Our work with partner, Conservation International, will help raise the quality of life for Raja Ampat communities, as well as protecting one of the world's most pristine reefs."

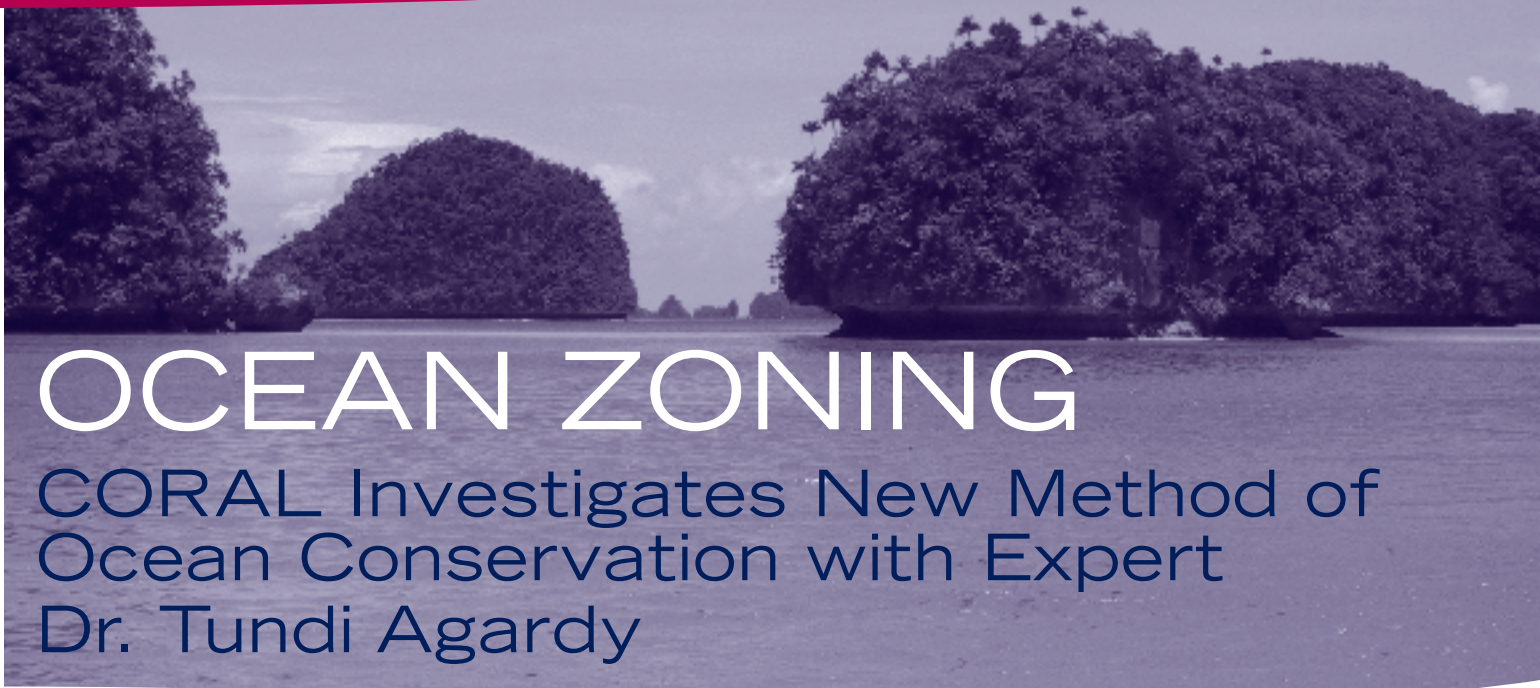
Proposed Raja Ampat Tourism Fee Distribution and Usage

70% Community Development and Conservation, such as:

- Research, monitoring, and cataloging of species and reef health
- Patrolling to prevent poaching and destructive fishing
- Funding for nurses and supplies at mobile mother and baby's clinic

30% Government

- To be determined annually by Raja Ampat government offices



OCEAN ZONING

CORAL Investigates New Method of Ocean Conservation with Expert Dr. Tundi Agardy

Change. We embrace it. We fear it. What changes are coming in marine conservation? And will we be ready for them?

Scientists have said that marine protected areas (MPAs) are the best means of protecting coral reef habitat. It's one of CORAL's tenets. But as our understanding and use of reefs grows, shouldn't our methods of protecting them also mature?

Ocean Zoning and Marine Protected Areas

In a conversation with Dr. Tundi Agardy, CORAL explores her recent article "Ocean Zoning is Coming." Dr. Agardy, a preeminent expert on marine protected areas (MPAs), explains the difference between traditional protected areas and one of the newest methods of marine conservation, ocean zoning. "Many MPAs only have one type of zone—no fishing—otherwise known as "no-take." In true zoning management, there would be different zones that address all types of use: fishing, boating, diving, snorkeling, and even industrial uses."

Agardy explains that ocean zoning integrates various methods already used by MPA area managers, such as:

- **Determining Biophysical Status and Connectivity:** This includes collecting data, such as size and health of fish stocks,

presence of rare or endemic species, habitat fragility, overall reef health, presence of spawning grounds, and links to other ecosystems.

- **Measuring Levels and Types of Use:** In most current marine conservation efforts, each sector individually determines sustainable limits on use: fisheries determine catch or gear limits; tourism decides on the allowable number of visitors; researchers allocate a certain number of species taken. Zoning takes this one step further and looks at all types and levels of use from all sectors at one time.

- **Combining Ecological and Use Data:** Combining these data sets in a specific geographic region allows managers to preserve the habitat while addressing the needs of all who rely on the reef for their livelihood. It is holistic and responds to real human needs.

Overcoming Resistance: MPAs and Standards a Good First Step

As logical as ocean zoning may sound, it is relatively unproven. Some conservationists question its feasibility, given that current MPAs are underperforming. Others balk at the increase in time needed to create well-

managed ocean zones as compared to standard protected areas. Still others resist the idea of regulating the "mystical and wild seas."

Although MPAs are not a necessary pre-cursor to ocean zoning, the presence of MPAs makes implementing zoning easier. Agardy says, "A community's process for establishing and running a successful MPA is similar to instituting zoning. Ocean zoning can be a natural progression from a protected area."

Brian Huse, CORAL's Executive Director, sees Standardized Codes of Conduct for marine recreation businesses as another possible pre-cursor to zoning, "With our standards work in Mesoamerica and Hawaii, we create environmentally sustainable guidelines for different types of businesses. These guidelines could serve as a basis for applying zoning."

Agardy emphasizes our need to embrace these changes. "Current marine conservation can't keep pace with rampant overdevelopment and overuse. We need to employ objective and comprehensive strategies that will widen and strengthen existing protected areas. Zoning is a logical progression from standard MPAs and allows us to better link land use to marine protection. This will improve our chances for conservation success."



SEND A LETTER TO YOUR REPRESENTATIVE IN SUPPORT OF THE CORAL CONSERVATION ACT

With just 45 seconds of your time, you can send a letter to your House and Senate representatives asking them to support the Coral Reef Ecosystem Conservation Amendment Act. This bill is now before the House and will be voted on at any time.

The bill reauthorizes the Coral Reef Conservation Act of 2000. In addition, the Administration is also asking for amendments that will provide greater protection for coral reefs while enhancing marine debris removal and increasing the government's ability to work through cooperative partnerships. Please take a moment to help protect reefs in the US States and territories.

○ Just 45 seconds of your time will help protect turtles, corals, and other animals from getting caught in marine debris. Show your support for the Coral Conservation Act by signing our online letter to your representative.

www.coral.org/supportus/advocacy

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Photo: Glenn Ostle