

The Involvement of the Private Sector in Marine Protected Area Planning, Management, and Conservation: Case Studies from the Indo-Pacific

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Science is effective in informing the design of successful marine protected areas (MPAs), only if balanced with socioeconomic, cultural, and political realities. The importance of involving community stakeholders in MPA planning, design, and management is now widely acknowledged and accepted. One key coral reef stakeholder group that has received increasing attention in recent years are private sector marine recreation providers (MRPs)—dive, snorkel, kayak, and boating operators. MRPs in coral reef tourism destinations have a vested economic interest in supporting coral reef conservation, as their business depends upon a healthy reef. They can play a key role in successful conservation if educated, aware, and involved in the process. MRPs can also pose frustrating obstacles for marine park/resource managers if their needs are not addressed and they are not part of conservation planning. The Coral Reef Alliance (CORAL) works in the Indo-Pacific to build the support and collaboration of MRPs in marine protected areas. Through case studies we illustrate the importance and process of involving MRPs in coral reef conservation strategies. Participation of this key stakeholder group not only builds local support for conservation, but also helps fulfill critical conservation objectives such as financial support of resource management costs, assistance with biophysical monitoring of reefs, patrolling and reporting violations, educating visitors on best environmental practice, and providing local communities with non-extractive, non-destructive employment alternatives.