

## **Installation of Mooring Buoys in Thailand: Lessons Learned for Coral Reef Tourism Management**

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Coral reef tourism is widely regarded as one of the fastest growing activities in Thailand for two decades. In recent years, greater concern has been expressed over the condition of the coral reef areas. The increasing economic significance of diving, the growth of coral reef-based tourism activities, and the perceived desire of many tourists to experience the pristine natural habitats of the tourist image has contributed to an increase in assessment of the impacts of tourism. In Thailand adverse effects which have been reported include coral damage from boat anchors, boat groundings, snorkelers, SCUBA divers and sea walkers. Installation of mooring buoys has been recognized as an important tool to mitigate negative impacts from coral reef tourism. Many mooring buoy installation projects have been carried out in Thailand for many years. However the problems concerning installation and maintenance of mooring buoys are still existed. There are several government and private agencies that implement the mooring buoy installation projects. Unfortunately, there is usually little or no coordination between them. There is also no coordination between mooring buoy stakeholders. Mooring buoy installation agencies often fail to understand users' need. Therefore the mooring buoys are ineffectively utilized. Moreover there is no clearly assigned agency for long-term maintenance of mooring buoys. The installed mooring buoys are often damaged or lost particularly during monsoon seasons. Lesson learned during the last decade lead to implementation strategies that recognize the interconnections between relevant agencies in trying to manage coral reef. The important recommendation includes establishing a special mooring buoy committee at local level for better coordination between relevant agencies and to manage all mooring buoy issues such as determining buoy type, buoy size, buoy number, boat type, boat size, boat number and clear objective of mooring buoy installation of a given coral reef site. Data, information and guideline for using mooring buoys should be widely publicized. Regulation enforcement, monitoring and evaluation of mooring buoy installation projects should be consistently carried out. Mooring buoy users should participate actively in coral reef management and pay the maintenance cost. Mechanisms of financial sustainability must be developed. The private diving companies, volunteer associations and non-governmental organizations should play a major role for mooring buoy and coral reef management. Besides installation of mooring buoys the projects on buoy installation for coral reef zoning are also needed. The buoys could be systematically used as marked areas for boats and divers. One of the great challenges facing coral reef managers in Thailand is how to integrate buoy installation system within the ambit of coral reef tourism management and long-term sustainability of coastal ecosystem.