

Sustainable Tourism in a Marine Protected Area : Koh Chang, Thailand

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Mu Koh Chang, a new tourism destination of Thailand, is located in the eastern part of the Gulf of Thailand. There are over 50 Islands in the area which harbor approximately 16 km² of coral reefs. The Thai Government declared it as a special administrative zone for sustainable tourism development through the Designated Area for Sustainable Tourism Administration (Public Organization) in 2002. An estimated 30% of the coral reefs are within the area of jurisdiction of Mu Koh Chang National Park which was established in 1982. Mu Koh Chang was selected as one of the demonstration sites for the coral reef subcomponent under the UNEP/GEF Project on Reversing Environmental Degradation Trends in the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand. The main objective of this project is to remove or reduce the causes of coral reef degradation in Mu Koh Chang by applying a new model of co-management in the area and restoring certain deteriorated areas for education and tourism purposes. The significant activities would implemented for sustainable tourism were; i) study on carrying capacity for tourists; ii) establishing diving trails at particular sites; iii) establishing local guide center and encouraging local guide activities; iv) installing additional mooring buoys; v) academic supports for local communities and private sector to encourage public participation for coral reef management and conservation for ecotourism; vi) encouraging local people and tourism organizations to clean up coral reefs; vii) study on determination criteria of tourist fees for coral reef management purposes. The project also included major activities to mitigate impact and accelerate natural recovery are: i) monitoring coral reef conditions in both ecological and socio-economic aspects; ii) developing a demonstration project of coral reef restoration by using coral fragments and natural recruitment; iii) monitoring and controlling land-based pollution; iv) supporting research on mariculture of economically important marine organisms. The success of the management model in Mu Koh Chang can be applied to other areas which have similar problems in the Pacific region.

Keywords: Koh Chang, Coral Reef, Sustainable Tourism