

# Lessons from Vietnam's First Marine Park

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**T**he recent establishment of a marine park in Vietnam offers lessons for future marine reserves in the country as well as for other countries considering their establishment.

The waters around Hon Mun, a small (1.1 km<sup>2</sup>) island in Nha Trang, a famous beach-side tourist town of southern Vietnam, have recently been designated as Vietnam's first marine park. The park proposal was initiated after a survey by a World Wildlife Fund (WWF) funded team of marine scientists from the Institute of Oceanography (see p. 16) in March 1993. The purpose of the park is to conserve its high coral reef biodiversity while encouraging low-impact marine tourism and maintaining a sustainable fishery. However, there have been problems as well as successes (see Box).

## Obstacles and Solutions

### "Marine Park" - a Mistake

The term "marine park" led to overuse of the park before any capability of control and management could set in. The loss of all six moorings (to prevent anchor damage) in two weeks was one result. A better term would be "marine reserve" or "fisheries sanctuary" which emphasize protection and the value of the site in terms of fisheries. The naming of future marine protected areas (MPAs) should be done with caution and in alignment with their main objectives.

### Overpublicity

On one hand, the photo contest sped up the approval of the park by showing the government what there was to protect at Hon Mun. On the other hand, the

widespread publicity created an influx of visitors to the island. Tourist boat operators were successfully selling their "Trips to Hon Mun Marine Park" even before the designation of the park, while fishers took their last chance before legislation took control.

The negative impacts of publicity could have been prevented if the capacity for

users was too strong to remove. The exclusion of the users from the project has resulted in a total lack of understanding and support from the users who undoubtedly continue to exert pressure on the resources.

Meetings between the park authority (yet to be identified) and tourist boat operators and fishers, both formal and casual, are needed to incorporate views

from all park users for the revision of park rules and management strategies.

### Insufficient Funding

This is partly a reflection of the low priority for marine conservation by both local and foreign agencies with financial potential. The situation was worsened by the wastage

of available funds. All the money spent on the moorings was wasted because no authority would take up the responsibility to protect them.

With the thriving tourism of Nha Trang, Hon Mun Marine Park is fully capable of generating its own operational funds. Tourist boat operators, tourists and fishers should contribute to the maintenance of the park. Fund-raising events such as the photo contest are encouraged. A well managed protected area will attract sponsors.

Six other coral reef sites have also been surveyed and shown to have high conservation priorities. The lessons from Hon Mun are useful for the planning of these sites to avoid "paper parks" with no protection or management, where the values for conservation, fisheries and tourism are eventually lost. **G**

SUCCESSSES	FAILURES
<p><b>Awareness Promotion:</b> The Hon Mun Underwater Photo Contest successfully generated awareness of marine conservation at both the governmental level and the general public.</p> <p><b>Park Approval:</b> Approval of the park proposal took only 8 months.</p>	<p><b>Overuse and Degradaation:</b> The coral reefs were seriously overused and damaged by tourists and fishers; anchors, litter, dynamite fishing, and the collection of coral, seashells and aquarium fish.</p> <p><b>No Management:</b> No government department manages the park.</p>

protection - rules and authority - were ready during the promotion of the park.

### Concept New and Foreign

MPAs are a new issue in Vietnam. There is no government agency with clear mandate for this issue although an array of departments from fisheries to science and military services are concerned.

Greater involvement of the Vietnamese scientists might have convinced the government of the importance and urgency of park protection. It is hoped that they will become more concerned in these issues. Changes in the status of the coral reefs in and out of the park, and before and after protection, should be monitored, documented and publicized regularly for evaluation and encouragement.

### Lack of Public Participation

The park was developed without consultation from its resource users - tourist boat operators and fishers. The customary barrier between the government and

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