

# The Management of Marine and Coastal Resources for Tourism Promotion in Hikkaduwa:

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Continued from yesterday

## CONSERVATION ISSUES

There are several issues at Hikkaduwa that are not in the best interest of marine conservation and management of coastal areas. First, the status of coastal clean-up is weak compared to CTI countries. Beach cleaning is irregular, not streamlined, uncoordinated and is not institutionalized. This work is not coordinated and the relevant statistics on the status of pollution and participants in beach cleaning are never monitored. The local government unit that has a jurisdiction over beach and marine areas has only a marginal involvement in cleaning activities.

Second, the marine pollution is relatively high in Hikkaduwa compared to CTI countries. The marine areas are not regularly monitored for coral destruction and the discharges of oil, plastic, etc. into the ocean scape that harm the resource base. There is no marine cleaning that is conducted in Hikkaduwa whilst it is a regular feature in many other CTI sites. Plastic and polythene pieces are often trapped in corals which is a concern. Smell of hydro carbon burning is medium to high in Hikkaduwa. It is unknown whether this burning has an impact on marine life which needs to be tested.

It is to be highlighted that about 30 Municipal councils around the VIP have put in place a well-coordinated system to clean coastal and marine areas. According to this system, all service providers by law are required to form their own apex bodies such as Hoteliers Association, Boat Operator's Association, Divers Association, etc. The coastal area is divided among apex bodies for cleaning on a regular basis. The Divers Association takes care of marine cleaning few times each month. The apex bodies are required to monitor beach and marine cleaning activities including the production of data on materials removed

# Learning from the Coral Triangle Countries



Visitor feeding a wild turtle in Hikkaduwa

from beach and marine areas and the staff numbers that participate in the relevant cleaning activities. The Divers Association is also entrusted to collect data in respect of coral destruction. All data collected is analysed by the environmental agency.

Third, the destruction of marine sites that is taking place in Hikkaduwa is relatively high. It was observed by the author that visitors more often than not, step on corals that leads to destruction. As a result, quite a lot of corals are damaged. There is evidence that corals are destroyed and pieces are found scattered on the marine floor. This aspect is hardly monitored either by service providers or the local government unit. It is a pain that the relevant authorities have no plans to clean marine area. As the area occupied by coral is relatively small and due to the presence of large number of tourists and boats, the

damage by tourists is inevitable. This situation is not seen in other CTI countries because of the deep engagement of service providers in cleaning and the local government unit is responsible for monitoring. The service providers do not take any responsibility for monitoring of coral destruction by visitors in Hikkaduwa whilst there are several arrangements to monitor such destruction to coral areas in other CTI countries.

The protection of marine resources in many CTI countries is implemented by service providers whilst the relevant association is expected to monitor the activity including the submission of monitoring reports to the authorities. Every tourist who enter the coral site is educated on the potential damage that can cause to coral through their actions. All visitors are informed of the need for good behaviour:

Fourth, the visitor awareness on the need to protect marine sites is very high at VIP and the Great Barrier Reef areas. Every visitor is given a good description of marine protection and a simple list of what "not-to-do" before their visit to the marine area. The importance of the diversity and the responsibility of each tourist to protect marine area is highlighted in the briefing. In addition, the service providers take the responsibility to monitor the marine enthusiast when out in the ocean.

Fifth, there is no marine conservation area nearby Hikkaduwa. A marine conservation area is not open for public. It is a protected area where species are allowed to propagate freely. The establishment of a marine conservation site adjacent to Hikkaduwa sanctuary will ensure the growth of species that are already found in this eco-system. All the CTI countries have relevant MCAs where there are several good lessons that are applicable to Hikkaduwa. There are as many as 500 marine conservation areas equivalent to over tens of thousands of hectares in CTI countries.

Sixth, it is necessary to collect a small fee from tourists that should go into a dedicated fund that enable protection and management of coastal and marine areas. A service levy from each service provider is also needed which should go into the fund mentioned above. In VIP in the Philippines, a part of the levy collection is utilized to fund livelihood activities beneficial to the local community around marine sites. The levy collection is well-established in VIP and in the Great Barrier Reef whilst it is

still at the stage of infancy in Raja Ampat.

Seventh, the conservation efforts by service providers is low at Hikkaduwa. It is very high in the Great Barrier Reef and relatively high in VIP. On the other hand, the knowledge is low in other CTI sites. The service providers lack knowledge and training on marine and coastal resources and the impacts on this sensitive eco-system from being polluted. Many service providers in Hikkaduwa have never attended any training on marine and coastal conservation. On the other hand, each service provider is required to attend a minimum of one workshop conducted by the environmental authorities in VIP, every year. In the meantime, it is required that each service provider attends a training session to be eligible for the issue of the annual licence to practice a trade such as hotel, bar, boat service, etc.

One happy news for the coral enthusiast and environmentalist is that there is a total ban of coral and fish removal in Hikkaduwa. This is strictly practised. Compared to some 30 years ago where the writer experienced removal of corals by the local residents for lime making.

## CONCLUSION

The author concludes that efforts by the government authorities in the conservation of marine and coastal area within Hikkaduwa offer tremendous opportunities for improvement. As mentioned in the article, such authorities are not actively engaged in raising conservation knowledge of tourists. There is no coordination of activities and there is hardly any monitoring of tourism activities and the impacts of their actions on marine areas in Hikkaduwa. There is already a very high level of service provider participation in the management of marine and coastal areas elsewhere whereas this is low at Hikkaduwa. The positive lessons in managing and conserving marine and coastal areas in CTI countries are very useful to Hikkaduwa and possibly other similar sites in Sri Lanka.

Concluded