

SIDP News

Issue 1 August 2005

Community action for sustainable use and conservation of coral reefs



The Workshop on 'Community Action for Sustainable Use and Conservation of Coral Reefs' was held in Semporna from June 29th - July 1st and included participants from Sabah Parks, Marine Conservation Society, Local Community Forum, Department of Fisheries, Fisheries Development Authority of Malaysia, Wildlife Department, Police and Immigration. Presentations and discussions on a range of topics took place, including the proposed zoning plan, strategies for controlling fishing, harvesting and farming of marine resources, Park regulations, monitoring and surveillance. Feedback from this workshop has been analysed and incorporated into draft regulations that will be used as a basis for discussion at the second workshop at the end of September 2005.

SIDP plans 2005-2008

The Darwin Project runs for three years, but our hope is that its legacy will last for very much longer and will be of value in a wider context than the TSMP. Our target for 2008 is to have measures in place that promote conservation of biodiversity and sustainable use of natural resources within the Park. Specific objectives of the project in relation to TSMP are:

- To establish Biodiversity Conservation (no-take) Zones, with enforcement measures operating.
- To identify marine species and habitats 'at risk' and introduce protection measures.
- To develop and introduce strategies for marine resource use under permit.
- To develop mariculture and sea ranching as an alternative livelihood for local communities.
- To establish a reef biodiversity monitoring programme.
- To establish a socio-economic monitoring programme.
- To develop an interactive environmental management and information planning system for TSMP.



Introducing SIDP

Community Action for Sustainable Use and Conservation of Coral Reefs is a 3-year Darwin Initiative project (2005-2008) being implemented in the Tun Sakaran Marine Park (TSMP) in Sabah, Malaysia. The short name 'Semporna Islands Darwin Project' (SIDP) emphasises the link with previous work in the area which culminated in the declaration of the Marine Park in June 2004. SIDP is being coordinated by the Marine Conservation Society and Sabah Parks, with local communities and other stakeholders playing a key role. Other partners are the Fisheries Department Sabah, Universiti Malaysia Sabah and WWF-Malaysia.

The challenge ahead

The TSMP presents a new challenge because it is the first marine protected area run by Sabah Parks where local people live within the park boundaries, use the resources and own some of the land. This calls for a different and collaborative approach to management if the objectives for the site are to be achieved. The other main challenge is to tackle the legacy of many years of unregulated, and in some cases, destructive fishing and to encourage alternative livelihoods which take pressure off the reefs.



Park Profile

- Sabah's largest marine park, gazetted in June 2004
- Total area: 35,000 ha, comprising 954 ha land and 34,046 ha of sea and coral reefs.
- Eight islands, the largest is Bodgaya (795 ha) with 3 peaks 360-455m high.
- Unique geology: the only islands off Sabah's coast formed from an ancient volcano.
- Over 100km of reefs, with corals growing from the shoreline to depths of over 50m.
- More marine species than elsewhere in Malaysia.
- 12 villages: total population over 2,000.
- Main occupations: fishing, cultivation and seaweed farming.
- Special provisions introduced to protect people's rights.



This project has been grant-aided by the Darwin Initiative through funding from the UK Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and is managed by the Marine Conservation Society.

Thanks to the following groups and organisations that are providing additional support: Lighthouse Foundation, Mon Aqua Tech Ltd., National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Tropical Marine Centre, Malaysian Airlines.

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SIDP launched with boatshow and workshop

The Semporna Islands Darwin Project (SIDP) was launched in July 2005 with a workshop in Semporna and a travelling boatshow that visited many of the settlements in the Tun Sakaran Marine Park (TSMP). These first activities concentrated on introducing local communities to the SIDP and the project team, and beginning the consultation process.



The SIDP Boatshow ran over 4 days and involved visits to settlements on seven islands in the TSMP, as well as the large collection of 'stilt-houses' on the reef top, where seaweed is farmed.



At each Boatshow location, the project team members explained the display and the aims of the project, and invited discussion and feedback.

The display material prepared for the Boatshow informed and involved local communities in a variety of ways. Explanatory leaflets were produced in four languages - Malay, Bajau, Suluk and English. The posters were bilingual, but concentrated more on pictures than text.



Community views

A structured questionnaire was used for the consultation exercise. Over 100 people were interviewed and efforts made to include all ethnic groups and ensure that women were well represented.

The main aim was record people's opinions on aspects such as the Park zoning plan, fishing regulations and protection of endangered species. Participation was good, and the overall results show a positive attitude towards the introduction of conservation measures.



The Boatshow presented a number of interactive activities. One was a large satellite image of the park overlaid with aerial photographs on which participants were asked to record place names, including beaches, headlands and so on. The aim of this is to ensure that local knowledge is recorded and used, so that the area maintains its identity and roots, rather than being given newly invented names by visitors.



'Have you seen these animals in 2005?'

This was another map-based activity designed to encourage local people to share and record their knowledge. People living in the Park know a great deal about their local environment and wildlife which is of immense value in the joint efforts to manage the Park and its resources. In this exercise, people were invited to mark the location of 5 rare or endangered species (reef shark, bumphead wrasse, mouse grouper, giant triton shell and green turtle) with small coloured stickers.



For children there was a drawing competition and 'Guess the Age of the Coral'. Both activities were designed for the participants to have fun but also to encourage them to think about the way that humans interact with the reefs.



Our Park; our Responsibility



A community approach to management is essential if the Park is to be a success, and is the cornerstone for the Semporna Islands Darwin Project.