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Assessing the Management Effectiveness of Hikkaduwa Marine National Park, Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Marine Protected Areas (MPA) are globally recognized conservation tools used in safeguarding the world's marine environments, ensuring their ecological sustainability. Achievement of predefined conservation goals of an MPA requires a strong correlation with its effective management measures. Hence, the assessment of MPA effectiveness has received greater attention as a frequently addressed element in MPA-related studies. However, a lack of studies on the management effectiveness of Sri Lankan MPAs can be considered as a major drawback that leads to severe management collapses in the process of MPA governance. This study aims to assess the management effectiveness of the first MPA in Sri Lanka, Hikkaduwa Marine National Park (HNP). The scorecard method was used to determine the management effectiveness of HNP as a measure of the success of its current management practices. Randomly selected 120 stakeholders (representing the groups of Tourists, fishermen, tourist guides, and business owners related to tourism) were interviewed using a semi-structured questionnaire. The key findings of the survey revealed that among all the different stakeholder groups, a significant proportion of tourists (77%) were unaware of the ongoing conservation measures in HNP. Furthermore, a considerable downgrade in the scorecard (18%) was observed in the year 2020 when compared to a previous study conducted in year 2005. According to our results, this study concludes that the loopholes in the existing management practices might have resulted in a low degree of awareness among tourists. Findings further suggest that it is a requisite to revisit the existing management framework in HNP into a more collaborative and inclusive approach based on a well-defined management plan.

Keywords: Marine Protected Areas, Management effectiveness, Hikkaduwa Marine National Park, Scorecard assessment, Awareness