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Ecotourism in Malaysia's Marine Parks: Principles, Issues and the Effects of 'Green Washing' Practices



By
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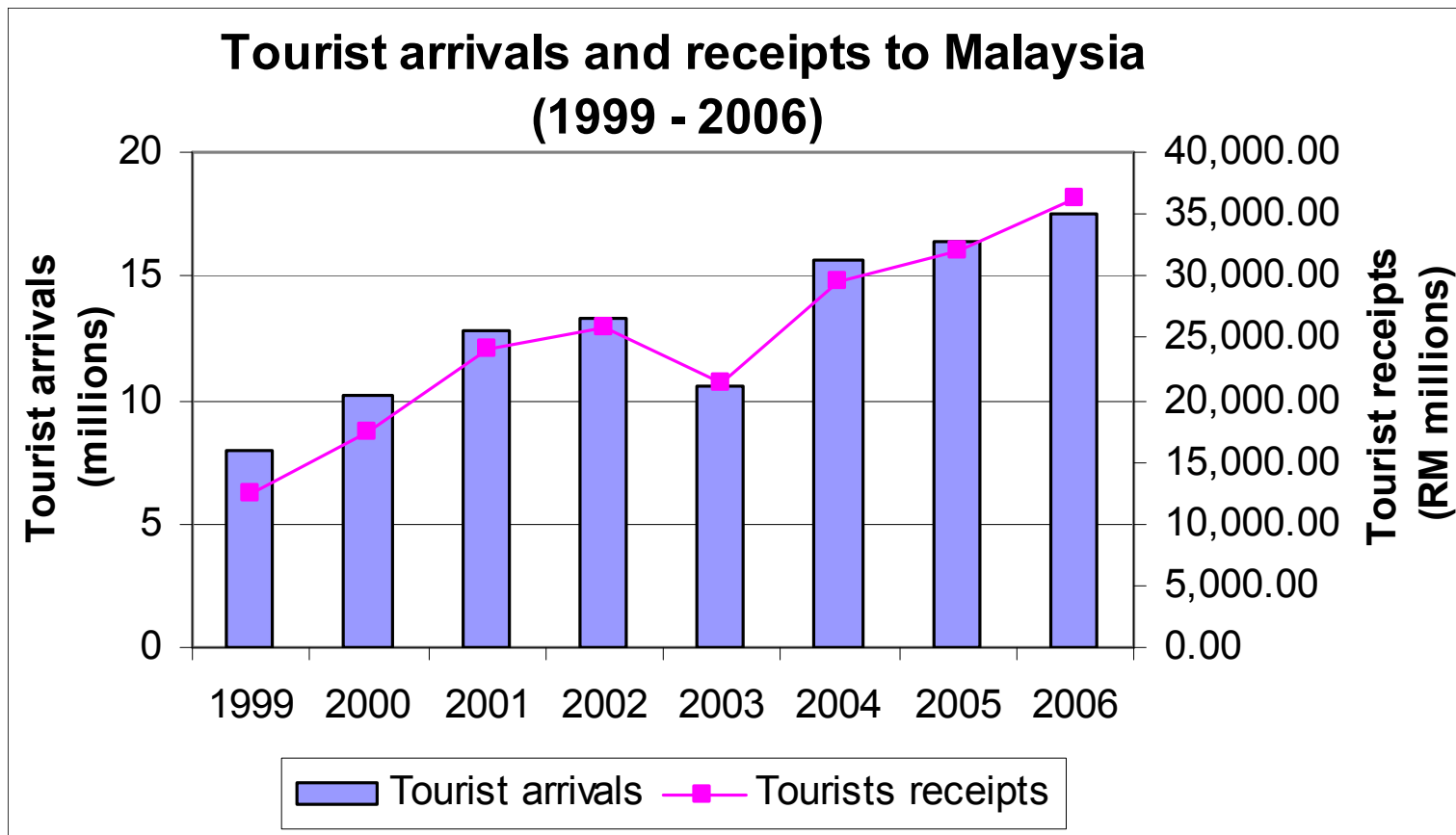
5th Asia Pacific Ecotourism Conference 2007 (APeco 2007) – Marine Ecotourism: Emerging Best Sustainable Practices and Success Stories. [27-28 October 2007, Terengganu].

Presentation Outline

- Introduction
- Background
- Principles of ecotourism
- Issues affecting the Malaysia's marine parks
- Effects of 'Green Washing' practices
- Discussion
- Conclusion

Introduction

- Tourism sector ranks 2nd after oil and gas in Malaysia.
- Earning the country more than RM 30 billion in 2006.
- Arrivals to Malaysia totaled 1,705,913 (March 2007); a 10.7% increase from last year's March figure of 1,541,056.
- Ecotourism in marine parks is a rapidly expanding area within the tourism sector as a whole.



Overall tourist arrivals and receipts to Malaysia from year 1999 to 2004

Marine Parks

- Established by the Fisheries Act of 1985, under Part IX – Marine Parks and Marine Reserves (Sections 41 – 45).
- Protected area of the sea zoned 2 nautical miles from the shore at the lowest low tide point; except for Pulau Kapas in Terengganu; Pulau Kuraman, Pulau Rusukan Besar and Pulau Rusukan Kecil in Labuan which are zoned 1 nautical mile.
- Water of 40 islands in Malaysia gazetted as Marine Parks.

Marine Parks in Malaysia

| State | Number of marine parks |
|----------------------------|------------------------|
| Kedah | 4 |
| Terengganu | 11 |
| Pahang | 9 |
| Johor | 13 |
| Wilayah Persekutuan Labuan | 3 |
| Total | 40 |

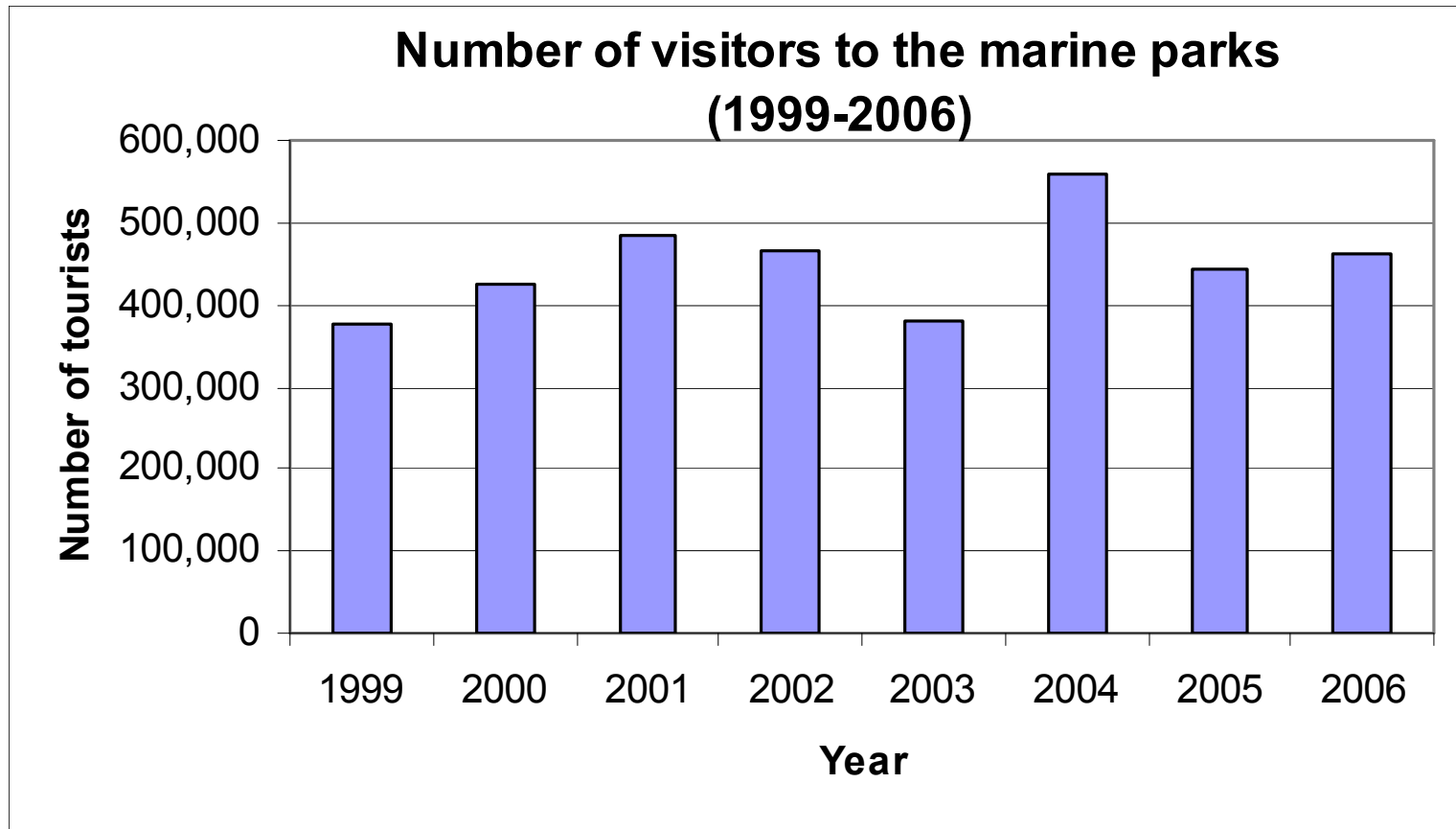
Functions of Marine Parks

- Conservation of resources.
- Protection and management of the environment.
- Habitat restoration and rehabilitation.
- Promotion of awareness and education.
- Conservation and research.



Crisis in Marine Parks

- Marine parks faced with the task of maintaining an uneasy balance between conservation and tourism activities.
- Number of visitor to the marine parks has grown dramatically to 463,458 in 2006.
- At present, the marine parks receive 400,000 tourists in average a year.



Total number of visitors to the marine parks from year
1999 to 2006

Background

Ecotourism: Definitions and Principles:

- There is no universally accepted definition of ecotourism - considerable overlaps in the definitions of ecotourism.
- Perhaps the most over-used and mis-used word in the tourism industry - marketing purposes.



The National Ecotourism Plan 1997:

‘Travel and visitation that is environmentally responsible to relatively undisturbed natural areas in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (including any accompanying cultural features; both past and present), promotes conservation, has low visitor impact and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local populations’.

Potential marine ecotourism activities vs. marine tourism activities

- Diving and snorkeling
 - Boating (expedition cruising, sea kayaking, canoeing, ocean rafting)
 - Visiting coastal communities
 - Visiting coastal cultural monuments
 - Coastal hiking and reef walking
 - Coastal camping
 - Underwater photography
 - Nature walks, etc.
- Traveling on large cruise ships
 - Jet skiing
 - Windsurfing
 - Sport fishing (consumption)
 - Beachcombing (searching for shells and removing them from the beach)
 - Surfing, etc.



The National Ecotourism Plan 1997

- To assist the development of Malaysia's ecotourism potential at Federal and State levels.
- The Ministry of Tourism Malaysia coordinates the planning, promotion and regulation of the Plan.
- The Plan: 7 parts, 25 guidelines, 4 categories
Category 3: Guidelines according to Ecosystems
(Guideline 3: marine park and islands)

NEP Guidelines for Marine Parks

Site Planning & Management

- Land use planning
- Mangrove forests on marine park
- Water catchment area
- Forest clearing
- Buffer zone
- Sewerage system
- Dredging or mining of sea sand corals and any other marine resources
- Freshwater supply
- Marine park management guidelines
- Number of visitors
- Construction of tourist facilities

Operator Qualifications

Ecotourism Pros and Cons

Pros

- Environmental
- Economic
- Social

Cons

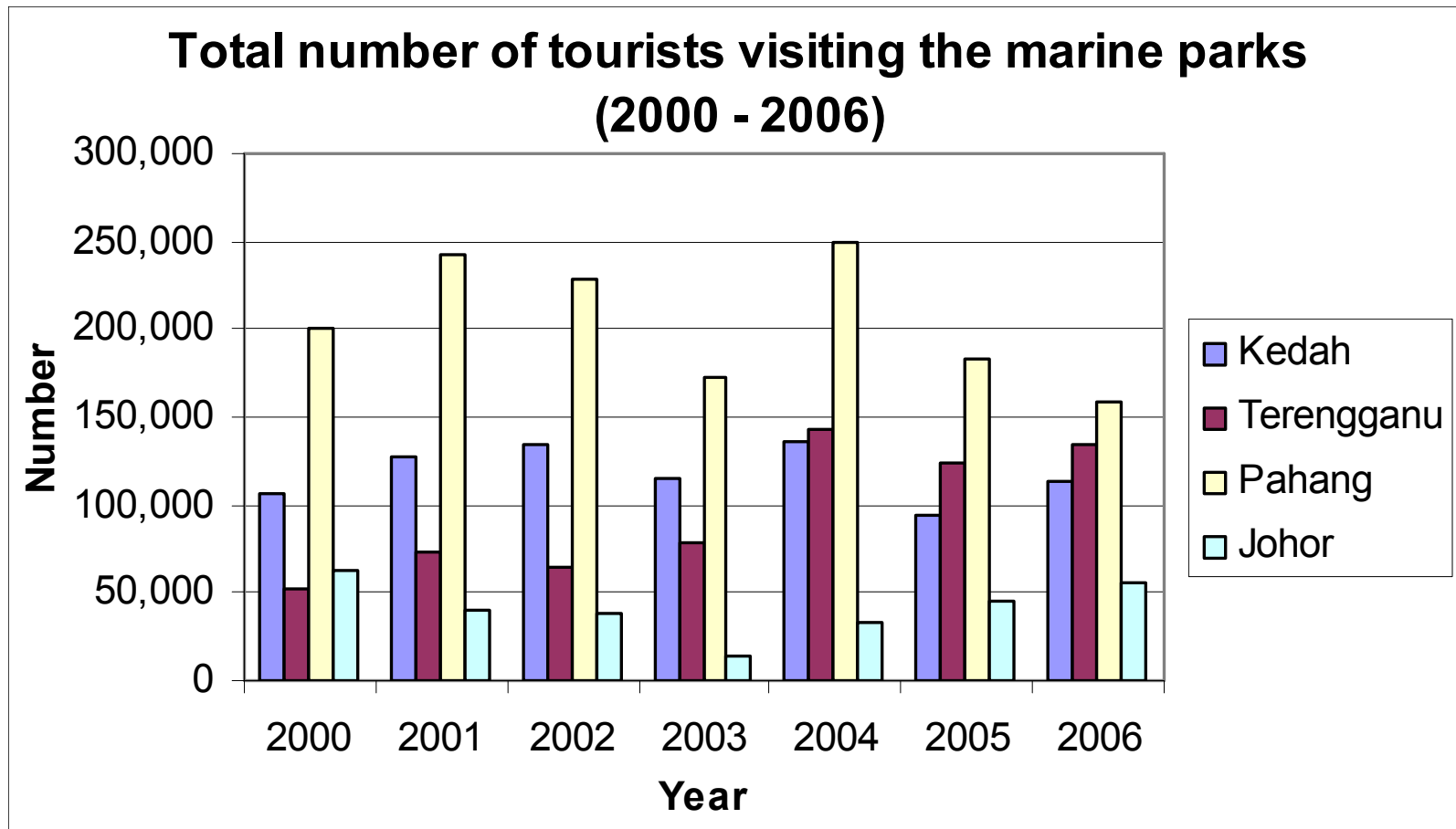
- Effects similar to mass tourism sector if uncontrolled.

Effects of 'Green Washing' Practices

- Same detrimental effects as that of mass tourism if promoters do not strictly adhere to the precepts of ecotourism.
- A loose interpretation of definition allows tour agents / operators to promote themselves as something that they are apparently not.
- Can be seen from the fact that there are increased numbers' of visitors, as a result of increased promotion done by various parties to generate economic revenue.
- Once destinations become popular, it is often difficult to control development activities - gradually destroys the environmental resources on which it depends on.

Problems Associated with Marine Parks

- Overcrowding of visitors
- Environment degradation
- Effect of land development
- Lack of coordination
- Lack of enforcement
- Lack of awareness



Total number of tourist arrivals to the marine parks from year
2000 - 2006

Overcrowding of Visitors

- Overcrowded with snorkelers and divers: uncomfortable - accidentally stepping onto corals.
- Increased pollution from oil residues - more tourist boats.
- Degrading of coral reefs' ecosystems - boat anchors.
- Contamination of water by sewage and garbage.
- Contamination caused by detergents or sun blocks.
- Shortage of freshwater.
- Turtles nesting areas on the islands.
- Fish feeding activities.

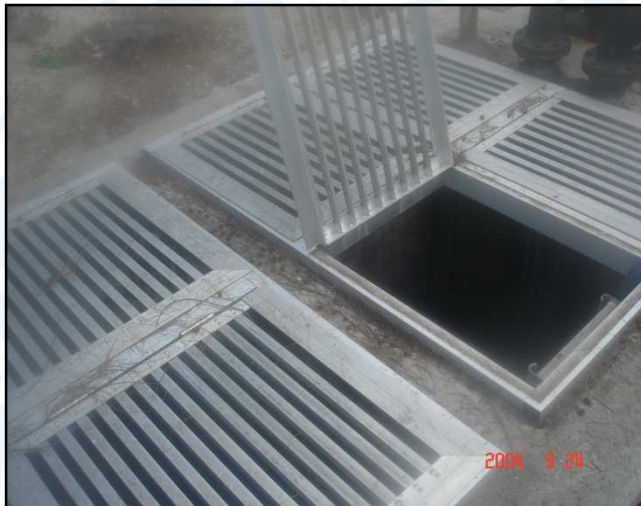


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Environment Degradation

- Inefficient sewage treatment system.
- Nutrient runoff a significant threat to reefs in the parks, particularly near large population areas.
- Excessive sewage into the water column act as nutrients in the water, fuelling growth of phytoplankton and algae.





Examples of the algae colonies recorded at Pulau Redang Marine Park in 2004.

Effects of Land Development

- Sedimentation.
- Excessive development of chalets/resorts.
- Marine parks – ecologically rich and sensitive areas should only have low density development.
- Construction of general tourism infrastructure and facilities such as roads and airports, golf courses and marina.
- Aiming for short term goals of rapid development - restricts sustainable economic development.

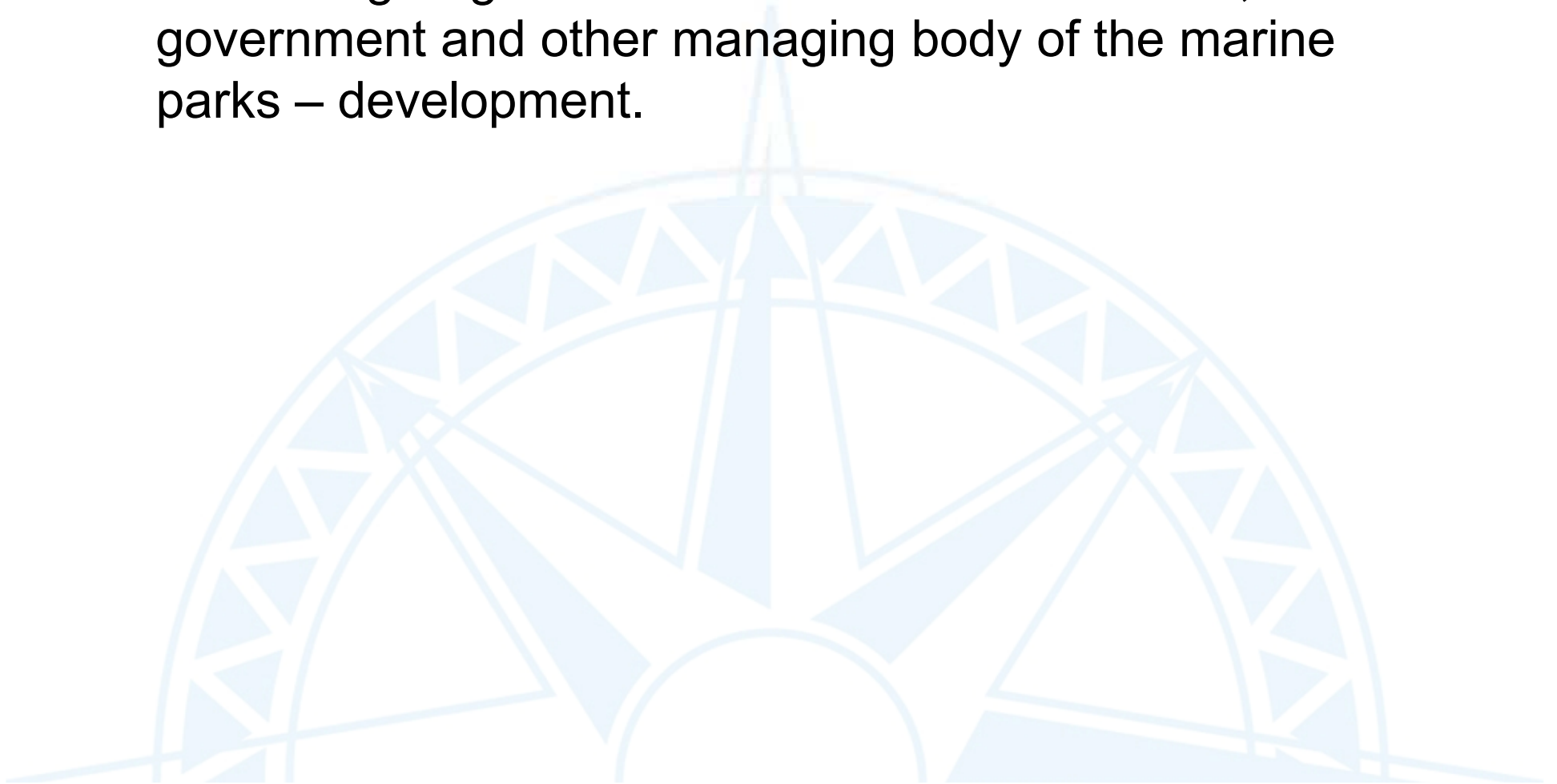


Number of hotel / chalets in selected areas in Terengganu (2004):

| Location | Estimated size (in sq. km) | Number of Hotels/Chalets | Number of rooms |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------|
| Kuala Terengganu | 605 | 41 | 1,747 |
| Marang | 666 | 13 | 281 |
| Dungun | 2,735 | 16 | 563 |
| Besut | 1,234 | 15 | 302 |
| Kemaman | 2,536 | 15 | 669 |
| Setiu | 1,304 | 12 | 318 |
| Hulu Terengganu | 3,875 | 6 | 104 |
| Pulau Redang | 25 | 16 | 691 |
| Pulau Kapas | 3 | 7 | 129 |
| Pulau Perhentian | 16 | 43 | 1,140 |

Lack of Coordination

- Conflicting targets and mandates within Federal, State government and other managing body of the marine parks – development.



Lack of Enforcement

- Shortages of staff
- Illegal encroachments



Lack of Awareness

- Conservation fee collection
- Pilfering of corals - tourists' poor attitude
- Illegal encroachments



Number of cases handled by the State (Kedah, Terengganu, Pahang and Johor) marine parks offices:

| Year | Total cases |
|------|-------------|
| 2003 | 74 |
| 2004 | 28 |
| 2005 | 54 |
| 2006 | 61 |

Discussion

- Address concerns
- Many efforts to better understand ecotourism, as well as to improve its planning, management and marketing techniques have been carried out - efforts still seem to be inadequate.

Current practices in the marine parks somehow as damaging as mass tourism:

- The main activities in marine park islands such as snorkelling and diving, damage corals, particularly by irresponsible tourists.
- Demand for accommodation has resulted in a concentration of chalets/resorts in unsuitable areas and excessive development.
- The presence of tourist facilities places high demand on limited water resources.
- Most of the marine park islands are still lacking proper sewage and solid waste disposal systems.

Gaps in Ecotourism Practices in the Marine Parks

| Sustainable Ecotourism Policies | Genuine Ecotourism Practices |
|---|---|
| Involves travel to relatively undisturbed natural destinations. | Most marine parks have been disturbed ecologically by various human activities. For example litter, accommodation, access routes and other tourism infrastructure impose great stress on the ecology. |
| It should minimize impact and promote conservation. | Harmful environmental impact has been increasing due to development activities. |
| It builds environmental awareness among tourists. | There is still a lack of awareness on conservation issues among tourists (especially the locals). |
| It involves small groups of tourists at a time. | There have been increases in the number of tourists to most of the islands. |
| It should provide direct financial benefits for the local people. | Provides job opportunities to the people to some extent as most of the local fishermen on the marine park islands have now ventured into tourism related businesses. |

Issues Concerning the NEP Guidelines

- The NEP guidelines address the common problems in theory.
- Basically in practice, there are non compliance in some areas.
- Guidelines not legally enforceable.

Conclusion

- Benefits reaped from ecotourism are often negated by the impact of activities needed to support the industry.
- The NEP guidelines are not 'stand-alone' guidelines as it is generic to impact on actual management of tourism in Marine Parks - should be seen within the context of other existing guidelines, policies and law.
- A need to support the guideline with site-specific management plans.

‘Although difficulties of definition frustrate measurement, it is widely recognised that ecotourism is increasing and coastlines are under growing pressure from tourism and other economic activities, resulting in increased pressure on fragile resources and a greater need for planning and management’.

Dr. Geoffrey Wall, Associate Dean, Faculty of Environmental Studies, University of Waterloo, Canada. *In Marine Ecotourism: Issues and Experiences* (Book). 2003.



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THANK YOU

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