



Don't Kill Them with Kindness: Re-evaluating Marine Ecotourism



it is TIME to rethink and reassess

Importance/Emergence of Ecotourism



Ecotourism has become increasingly popular over the past 20 years and is a rapidly growing sector within the tourism industry.

The number of participants in ecotourism involving wildlife observation has been steadily increasing with the estimated to be between 79 and 440 million and projected to double over the next 50 years. Ecotourism has generated over US\$165 billion annually worldwide in 2010s.

If managed responsibly, ecotourism can provide substantial financial benefits to local communities while at the same time straightening conservation efforts.

Marine environments also support a range of ecotourism attractions. Nature experiences lead to increased concern for nature, and ultimately, the expression of conservation behaviours. Captive and non-captive ecotourism experiences often provide opportunities to view iconic megafauna at close range, which associate with conservation support.

The increasing popularity of ecotourism worldwide calls for reassessment of its conservation outcomes and the development of appropriate management frameworks to ensure the conservation of the species and habitats involved as well as the long-term sustainability of this industry.

Current Issues of Ecotourism

A global meta-analysis of ecotourism from 251 case studies found that only **36%** of all ecotourism programs were **unsustainable** due to negative impacts on target species, usually resulting from large numbers of poorly-regulated or managed tourists.

Though 63% of operations were classified as sustainable (not resulting in the long-term destruction or degradation of utilized wildlife resources), only **18%** were found to have made measurable **positive** contributions to conservation



01 Research

Increase research on the ecology of target species, physiological and baseline data

02 Enforcement

Combination of scientific-based knowledge, appropriate policies, enforcement of regulations and regular monitoring

03 Adaptive

Application of an adaptive management framework to continuously improve existing policies

04 Local

communities and stakeholders involvement in development and improvement of tourism



Limitations of Ecotourism

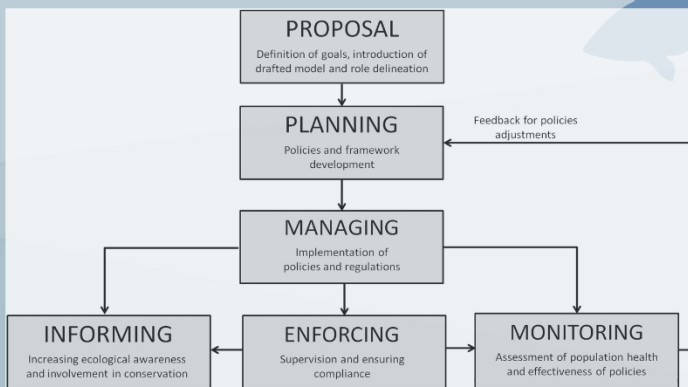
- Negative impacts on wildlife can be difficult to confirm or predict, as they may not be immediate, obvious, or easily detectable without long-term behavioural or physiological data
- Revenue from major industrialized ecotourism operations does **not directly benefit local economy**, whose livelihood is affected by the loss of fishing
- Regulatory compliance of tourism operators is often difficult to monitor, and adherence to guidelines is often based on voluntary codes-of-conduct
- Tourism may **create misperceptions** that species are adequately **protected** and conserved when that is not the case
- Tourism infrastructure may increase access to remote, previously undisturbed habitat, and along with habituation



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Recommendations

Adaptive Management Framework



Active participation of governments, management agencies, researchers and scientists, operators, and local communities in the main stages— planning, managing and monitoring. **Feedback mechanisms** to improve management frameworks with info collected through monitoring.

Policies & Management Strategies at 3 Different Scales

GLOBAL	Broad, simple, clear policies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Formally officialised - Improve coordination - Increase compliance (financial penalties or "peer pressure" effect) - Worldwide sharing of compatible information on policies' effectiveness - Uniform legislations for migratory species
NATIONAL	Management of resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Involvement of different stakeholders - Focused on the local ecosystems and species present - Uniforming legislations and policies to avoid overlapping of jurisdiction (risk of loopholes and misinterpretation) - Institution of entry fees, patents and official licenses - Official agencies and rangers to ensure compliance and enforcement
LOCAL	Tailored management <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Case specific - Promote self-regulation - Involvement of local communities - Long term studies to assess population health - Policies, guidelines and codes of conduct adjusted based on direct observations of effects

Given the complexity of ecotourism, analyzed in 3 different levels: Global, National and Local. This would allow various issues to be addressed at their appropriate scale and develop a long-term management framework.

- The combination of socio-economic and ecological knowledge is crucial for the development of effective management frameworks with long-term ecological sustainability in addition to a sustaining income.
- Long-term monitoring, stricter regulations and increased ecological awareness of both operators and visitors, independently, are needed. The development and application of such strategies and best practices require more than just the literature available. It is evident that more local traditional knowledge and monitoring assessments are required to cover the knowledge gap.

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