

Conservation and management of coral reefs in Sri Lanka; a review

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Key words: coral reefs, management, marine protected areas, special area management

Abstract

The status of coral reefs in Sri Lanka has been declining steadily in the recent past especially after the unprecedented coral bleaching event in 1998. In the post 1998 period several coral reefs have undergone phase shifts from live coral to algal mats and rubble banks with the exception of a few patch reefs in the Bar Reef Marine Sanctuary where an appreciable recovery of live corals has been recorded. The damage to reefs from the tsunami was variable; the most extensive damage suffered was recorded in the east coast, south of Batticaloa. Reefs continue to suffer from an overgrowth of algae, burial due to sedimentation, pollution and continued heavy exploitation of their living resources. Although varied legislation has been introduced at different times to control resource exploitation and the abuse of the marine environment there is little or no implementation. Since the late 1970's four marine protected areas have been established under the Fauna and Flora Protection Ordinance for biodiversity conservation, management of resource utilization and to buffer from tourism related impacts. However they continue to remain as paper parks although two of the protected areas were subjected to special area management planning. Species based conservation measures have also been introduced under the Fisheries Act to control the exploitation of rare and vulnerable marine aquarium fish species. History of reef conservation and management is presented with lessons learned from past experience.

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