

COMMUNITY MONITORING AND ASSESSMENT OF THE REEFS OF KOH TAO, THAILAND.

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Koh Tao, or Turtle Island, is a relatively small island (21km²) in the Gulf of Thailand, approximately 70km east from the coast between Chumporn and Surat Thani. The official permanent population is about 1400 people but this number increases substantially if tourists, who come mainly for the diving, evidenced by the 40+ dive schools on the island, and those catering to tourists are taken into consideration. A yearly influx of 300,000 people ensures that the local economy is both directly and indirectly involved with the tourism industry. Its crystal clear waters and abundance of corals and fish attract divers, experienced and novice alike, from around the world. This greater number of divers and tourists has resulted in widespread impacts to the reefs of Koh Tao. The Marine Branch of the Save Koh Tao Community Group consists of local dive schools and businesses and volunteers dedicated to the sustainable development and tourism of the island to ensure the survival of the reefs and the island's main source of income. Seven permanent transects have been set up around the island and their benthic cover, fish and invertebrate diversity & abundance and water quality are assessed each month by an Ecology Monitoring Program (EMP). The EMP focuses on the collection of simple, yet robust, data that can even be carried out by suitably trained novice divers. The program, endorsed by Scuba Schools International (SSI), is the responsibility of local dive shops and divers allowing for community involvement. All data collected are used to raise awareness, focus conservation and restoration efforts and published for presentation to local and regional government bodies for future planning. This poster aims to show changes to reef structure and ecology since initiation of the EMP in 2006.