Marine Protected Area Management in Thailand: Challenges and Solution

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Thailand covers 514,000 square km with a coastline of 3,000 km. This country has over 1,700 globally threatened species including several critically endangered mammal, bird, reptile, fish and plants. Thailand marine life is equally rich and substantially different species assemblages occur in the waters on either side of the narrow Thai Peninsula. About 35 species of mangrove and 12 species of seagrass have been reported with 5 species of turtle as well as dugong also found in this area.

To protect the endangered species in marine area, Thailand Government was established marine protected area more than five decades ago. Now, MPA has covered 12% of marine and coastal area and it also reported as protected under the jurisdiction of a number of government agencies. Thailand Government had a plan to increase MPA, accounting for 30%. Therefore, there is a need to classify more clearly what the overall visions is for Thailand's MPA and how they will contribute to national biodiversity conservation and sustainable development strategies.

Thailand's MPA include a diverse range of characteristics, from coastal area to remote island; with no local community inhabitants to area with dense population, and areas with a few thousand visitors per year to those with more than 300,000 visitors per year. The habitat composition in Marine Parks also range widely, from the domination of coral reefs to seagrass and mangrove.

Though Thailand's MPA system seems to be expanding and evolving, there are some obstacles which limit the success of the system including obsolete legislation, the lack of master plan for MPA, the uncontrollable illegal fishing, the lack of collaboration among management agencies, escalating pressure of tourism and threatening natural phenomena such as the global warming or tsunami.