

**Biodiversity and Conservation**

**(BC04)**

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| **Fact Sheet BC04: Best use of the marine resources and control snorkeling activities - coral friendly” snorkeler** | |
| **Overview** | |
| *Objective* | Near-shore marine ecosystems are beginning to show signs of damage as a result of the snorkeling and diving industry. The consistent presence of small and large groups of people in shallow coral and rocky reefs and other habitats can lead to significant degradation of an ecosystem over time.  Irresponsible or inexperienced snorkelers and divers regularly crush and break corals and other reef-dwelling organisms with fins, equipment and body parts. This damage usually comes as a result of people who are unable to maintain control in the water, stand or walk in a shallow area, fight a current, or get a closer look at, photograph, handle, touch and feed wildlife. In places with strong currents, surge and wave action, getting close to the reefs is downright dangerous. |
| *Action* | * ESTABLISH A NO-CONTACT POLICY. Promote a voluntary no-contact policy for recreational snorkelers and divers. These policies can be supported by encouraging the use of flotation vests for inexperienced snorkelers and discouraging the use of gloves by divers. * CONDUCT ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS BRIEFINGS FOR TOURISTS AND OTHER MARINE * ENTHUSIASTS. Educate tourists, photographers, videographers and others about the sensitive nature of near-shore marine and reef ecosystems and the potential impacts that can result from irresponsible snorkeling and diving. * DISCOURAGE FEEDING AND HARASSMENT OF SHARKS, REEF FISH AND OTHER MARINE WILDLIFE. The level of wildlife disturbance caused by snorkelers and divers can be significantly reduced with a voluntary policy of “take only photographs, leave only memories” that discourages fish feeding and harassment of wildlife. |
| *Key Challenges* | Patrolling and monitor tourists behaviors |
| *Regulatory Aspects* | * Law 4 for 1994 of environment * Law 102 for 1983 for protected areas |
| **Process** | |
| *Complexity* | Moderate |
| *Equipment & Material* | brochures, leaflets, signs, videos and awareness materials |
| *Human Resources* | Hotel trained staff |
| **Considerations** | |
| *Advantages* | * Grantee that marine environment is in a good condition * Conserve the main resources that tourist come to enjoy * Contribute the regional conservation actions |
| *Disadvantages* | None |
| **Impact** | |
| *Environmental* | * DISRUPTED SEA BOTTOM HABITATS. Contact from fins, equipment or body parts crushes and kills bottom dwelling organisms and their habitats. In heavily used areas, the cumulative effects of many snorkelers and divers can lead to increased levels of degradation in the ecosystem and a decrease in the quality of the visitor experience. * INCREASE IN SEDIMENTATION. Stirred-up sediment can disrupt sea-bottom communities, smothering and choking coral colonies and causing broader impacts in the ecosystem. * DISTURBANCE OF MARINE WILDLIFE. Excessive disturbance can cause animals to leave primary feeding and reproductive areas, which can lead to an overall decline in habitat health and a decrease in the primary features that attract tourists. When animals become habituated to being fed by divers or snorkelers, they may lose some of their ability to find food on their own, which can affect population size and change natural behaviors. * REMOVAL OF CORAL MUCUS. Repeated contact between divers and snorkelers and coral removes the coral’s mucus covering and causes physical damage to coral tissue. This can increase the susceptibility of corals to pathogens, diseases and other competitive organisms. |
| *Employment Opportunities* | yes |