

Abstract

Marine protected areas (MPAs) are believed to be important to preserve the world's degraded marine ecosystems. Although the Vietnamese government has recognized the vital role of MPAs, the lack in identifying MPA economic values and the lack of financial sources for enforcing the MPA policies remain as challenges for the sustainable management of MPAs in Vietnam. In addition, most MPAs in Vietnam are located in beautiful places where tourism contributes significantly to the local economy. Yet, overdevelopment of tourism is one of the stressors causing marine resource deterioration. This study firstly aims at estimating the economic value of the conservation status of the Nha Trang Bay MPA (NTB-MPA) in order to propose a reasonable marine conservation fee (MCF) as entrance fee to visit the MPA islands. The second objective is to investigate tourists' evaluation of conservation programs as a basis for future allocation of the collected MCF. A contingent valuation survey was carried out in NTB-MPA in August 2012, in which the target respondents were asked about their willingness to pay (WTP) to visit the MPA's islands. Respondents' opinions about the proposed conservation programs were also collected using program choice questions. 166 responses (83 Vietnamese/ 83 foreign tourists) were obtained from the survey. The mean WTP is estimated to be US\$5.99. The current entrance fee represents 8.3% of this WTP. A moderate marine conservation fee of US\$5 (VND100,000) is recommended based on the WTP's lower band. The economic value of NTB-MPA conservation programs is estimated at US\$6.5 million (VND130.6 billion). Income and awareness are found to correlate with tourists' WTP. As a reference for allocating the collected MCF, program choice result reveals that Vietnamese tourists consider that supporting waste treatment system and environmental education are more important while foreign tourists are more concerned about coral reef and fish stock recovery programs. The study expects to contribute a modest economic evaluation study for better conservation and management of the NTB-MPA. Higher revenue generated by collecting tourists' MCF may address the inadequate funding in the NTB-MPA as well as bring more opportunities for local fishermen to raise their low income with new alternative livelihoods.

Keyword: *WTP, contingent valuation, tourism, marine biodiversity, marine conservation fee.*