

## Houbihu MPA, the First One Beyond the Paper, in Taiwan

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Most Taiwanese MPA have been paper parks, so far, despite much effort by scholars and government officials to promote the idea, to implement the law, and to designate many MPAs. In addition to lack of law enforcement, lack of successful cases and therefore lack of confidence and support from stakeholders, have been the major impediments.

In the Kuroshio Conference 2011, the first success story was reported by Hsiao Tzai-Chuan. Mr. Hsiao chronicled the major events leading to the establishment of Houbihu Demonstration Area in the Kenting National Park. The key differences between this MPA and others were the following: leadership in the movement of conservation effort, communication between law enforcement and the stakeholders, participation and support of the local communities (see the following picture.).



Stakeholders and local communities were organized.

What is special in this case is that the law enforcement sector is willing to spearhead the campaign, and persists in the unpopular, but critical step of writing tickets to offenders.

The MPA was officially established in 2005, with restocking of sea urchins and turbo snails by research institutions tried before that or in the same

period. Between March 2005 and April 2009, a total of 230 offenders were fined. These statistics are in sharp contrast to other designated MPAs in Taiwan, and resistance from some people was also experienced (see the following pictures).



Graffiti on the post of the MPA



Vandalized patrol car

In the meantime, support from local communities and stakeholders increased as the effect of the conservation efforts started to show. The effects of the Houbihu MPA were noticed about two years after its establishment when scuba divers noticed differences from other dive sites in the area.

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Divers in the Houbihu MPA have more to see than in other dive sites.

Schools of fish, e.g., snappers, could be seen in the MPA, but not in nearby areas. Large sea urchins were scattered in shallow waters of the MPA, again, but not in nearby areas. By the power of word of mouth, even tourist numbers increased, especially for snorkeling activities, around the MPA area. This is the first case of a positive feedback between business and marine environment, as far as is known in Taiwan.

With increasing abundance of marine lives, the

temptation is also greater. Cases of poaching are still reported (see following pictures).



A poacher of sea urchins and her loot.

Continuous efforts from various sectors are obviously important and needed to ensure the everlasting success of this MPA. This example also shows that MPA could work in Taiwan. Once this psychological barrier is removed, more successful stories should appear. The MPA at Houbihu represents a link of coral reef ecosystems in the Kuroshio. Hopefully, the success of the Houbihu MPA could contribute to the overall health of coral reefs in this region.