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## **Estimating the Demand for Coral Conservation at Hikkaduwa National Park in Sri Lanka**

KMR Dharshani<sup>1,\*</sup>, RMW Rathnayake<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>Department of Tourism Management, Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka

\*hasinthahimesha@gmail.com

The Hikkaduwa coral reef in Sri Lanka has been the flag bearer of marine conservation in Sri Lanka. The reef was declared a marine sanctuary in 1979, the first official marine protected area in Sri Lanka. The coral reef at Hikkaduwa has suffered high degradation due to both natural and human activities. The live coral cover was decreased from 47 percent to 13 percent in a coral bleaching event in 1998, induced by the 1998 El Niño. Most of the corals are in bad shape after coral bleaching, pollution and damage by glass bottom boats and people walking on the reef. Most are unlicensed and have no regard for the reef or snorkelers. Several people have been severely injured by careless boat drivers who have also damaged the reef extensively over the years. It has been suggested that at least 30-40 percent of coral reef should be restored in order for it to be capable of sustaining itself. This study estimated the conservation tax that can be charged from visitors for conserving coral. Researcher carried out a choice experiment to examine the local adult visitors' willingness to pay (WTP) for coral conservation under different management strategies at the Hikkaduwa National Park. The sample size was 200. In the experiment four major choices were identified. The estimated WTP per visit as a conservation tax is LKR 15.80. Hikkaduwa National Park gets more than 75,000 visitors annually and if the policy makers implement a 'conservation tax', the required cost can be covered for the coral restoration programme at Hikkaduwa National Park.

**Keywords:** Hikkaduwa National Park, Coral Conservation, Willingness to Pay, Conservation Tax, Choice Experiment