

Technical Session (Oral) B4: Economics and Entrepreneurship



Socio Economic Aspects of Whale Watching Industry in Southern Coast of Sri Lanka

E.P.D.N. Thilakarathne, Terney Pradeep Kumara*, and R.M.G.N
Thilakarathne

*Department of Oceanography & Marine Geology, Faculty of Fisheries and Marine Science &
Technology, University of Ruhuna*

Abstract

Dolphin and whale watching is a new and blooming activity in Sri Lankan tourism industry. However, lack of data on activities and utilization of resources leads inefficiency of managing the resources and activities. Therefore, a scientific and socioeconomic approach is needed for the understanding and the management of whale watching activities, particularly in the Southern coast of Sri Lanka.

A socio-economic survey was carried out in Mirissa in southern coast of Sri Lanka from May 2011 to May 2012. The relevant data and information were collected through primary and secondary sources, through interviews with different stakeholders using pre-structured questionnaires. Secondary data were collected from different official reports and publications. According to the survey considerable proportion of the whale watching industry depends on foreign visitors who came from 45 countries, where the majority were from England, Germany, France, India, Russia & China. The total income generated from May of 2011 to May of 2012 was about LKR 294,767,058.70. From this, 98.52% (LKR 290,410,999.20) had been earned during the whale watching season (from October to May) where the highest monthly income (LKR 62,282,158.00) was earned during January 2012. Female were high among foreign visitors and highest number of foreigners were obtained among 45 to 60 years old. Retaining time in Sri Lanka of higher percentage of foreigners was two weeks and prefer to Southern coast was only one week. Their experience of whale watching and the satisfaction level of majority of them were "very good".

Therefore, whale watching industry is a highly foreign income generating industry and it may directly contribute to total tourism industry. But with the development of the industry it may negatively impacts on cetacean population. Therefore, a better understanding and a management system is needed to ensure the sustainability of this high profit industry.

Keywords: Socio-economics, Sri Lanka, Whale watching

* terney@fish.ruh.ac.lk