Coral Bleaching and Dive Operators in the Caribbean: Perceptions of Environmental Change

Dive tourism is a growing and important industry which is often reliant on a high quality natural environment. As dive tourism’s significance grows due to its economic and ecological impacts on many tropical destinations, it is important to understand how this special-interest tourism may be affected by environmental change. Mass coral bleaching episodes, a phenomenon with potentially severe implications for the health of coral reef ecosystems, have been increasing in intensity and frequency over the last three decades. This has begun to affect the enjoyment of visitors and the prosperity of individuals and dive tourism businesses that depend on reefs. Therefore, the purpose of this project is to explore the perceptions, opinions and adaptation strategies of dive operators in the Caribbean regarding coral bleaching and its effects on their business and dive tourism.
Preparing for Climate Change: Recognising early impacts through perceptions of dive tourists and dive operators in the Egyptian Red Sea. Gland, Switzerland: IUCN. 52pp. Front Cover: Diver enjoying the experience of diving on biodiverse and healthy Egyptian coral reefs. Photo by HEPCA Back Cover: Close up of Anthias, the signature fish species of the Red Sea. Available from Coral bleaching: Coral bleaching, whitening of coral resulting from loss of symbiotic algae or degradation of the algae’s photosynthetic pigment. Bleaching is associated with the devastation of coral reefs, which are home to approximately 25 percent of all marine species. Coral bleaching: Great Barrier Reef An overview of coral bleaching on the Great Barrier Reef. Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc. Coral bleaching has a variety of causes. Source: Data excerpted from Marshall, Nadine A., Marshall, Paul A., Abdulla, Ameer, Rouphael, Tony and Ali, Amr, “Preparing for climate change: recognising its early impacts through the perceptions of dive tourists and dive operators in the Egyptian Red Sea” (Current Issues in Tourism, 2010), p. 7, Table 1. The environmental impacts of climate change on reefs—including “biodiversity losses, loss of coral cover and reduced reef aesthetic”—potentially lowers the destination appeal for scuba divers to effected locations. The decline in destination appeal ultimately threatens Kuoni’s business through diminishing tourism interest. Kuoni is clearly doing extensive work in monitoring coral bleaching which is important in measuring the impact of climate change over time.