

SOCIO-ECONOMIC SURVEY

OF ATTITUDES TOWARDS

THE MONTEGO BAY MARINE PARK

OVERVIEW

The project

The objective of this project was to inform the development of management strategies for the Montego Bay Marine Park, based on a survey of stakeholder attitudes and perceptions. This survey was performed in August and early September 2005. It questioned stakeholders about:

- Awareness of the Marine Park and the coastal/marine environment;
- The perceived importance of the coastal/marine environment to individual enterprises and the overall economy;
- Perceptions of potential negative environmental impacts;
- Preferred management/institutional structures for marine resource conservation;
- Willingness to invest in marine resource conservation.

The survey questionnaire is attached as Appendix I. While only 26 of the resulting (complete) questionnaires contained enough responses for analysis, these constitute a reasonable cross-section of two of the three targeted survey areas (part of the “Hip Strip” tourist area on Gloucester Avenue in Montego Bay). Both basic statistical methods and a measure of subjective judgement were applied to evaluation of these results.

General findings

Overall, the survey found a fairly high level of awareness that the Marine Park existed, and general agreement that some form of protection for the coastal environment was a good thing.

There was considerably less agreement about what should be done and by whom, but a surprising degree of willingness to invest in or support conservation.

Expectations from and suggestions for Marine Park management fell generally into the categories of education and enforcement.

Mitigating Factors

The implementation of this survey coincided with a challenging period for the Montego Bay Marine Park. Five days prior to the implementation of the Socio-Economic Survey Training session (Soufriere, St. Lucia), the Trust was forced to suspend all staff and operations due to an unexpected short-fall in financing. While this situation was

expressly communicated to UNEP staff at the time, it remained the intention of the Trust to implement the survey, as initially proposed. What was not fully understood at the time, however, was the difficulties this situation would create with regards to implementation.

Throughout the duration of the project the Trust had no paid staff in its employ and therefore was forced to rely upon short-term volunteers/interns, and staff members otherwise engaged in emergency planning and fund-raising initiatives.

Furthermore, expected participation from our partner agency (NEPA) was not forthcoming, which placed the bulk of the project burden on an organization which had neither the backstopping capacity, nor budget to support the expenses typically associated with a project of this nature. (N.B. – It is worth noting that our NEPA counterpart did have an opportunity to collaborate with the socio-economic assessment conducted in Negril around the same time-frame.)

While the survey instrument was circulated to NEPA staff for review and comment, the Trust was also under pressure to implement the survey within a very short timeframe due to our dependence on temporary volunteer support. As a result, half of the surveys had been completed before comments regarding the design of the survey were received.

As a result of the aforementioned factors, only two of the three mapped regions were actually completed, and our initial projection of 100 surveys falls significantly short (26 actual).

Methodology

The primary methodology for conducting this assessment was through the targeted implementation of formal surveys, which were either independently completed, or administered (questions asked and responses filled in) by project facilitators.

While our initial intention was to focus on the broader “city of Montego Bay”, it was subsequently decided (based on the financial imperatives facing the Park), to focus on the primary commercial areas adjacent to the park:

- ◆ Zone 1 - the Hip Strip,
- ◆ Zone 2 - Downtown Montego Bay, and
- ◆ Zone 3 – Freeport

Each of these Zones represented (respectively) tourism; local commercial; and, off-shore commercial/residential stakeholders. Our survey teams initially consisted of two persons, and then one person, as individuals became more comfortable administering the survey, and to help cover more territory within our given window of opportunity.

Within each of these zones, specific businesses and individuals were further identified and targeted for survey/interview. Due to time constraints and the departure of the majority of our field team, surveys were only conducted in Zones 1 and 2.

DETAILED FINDINGS

Analysis of the survey results is summarized in Appendix II. The main findings are outlined below.

1. Demographic/sectoral breakdown of respondents

About 70% of the respondents providing demographic data were male, under 45 years old, and had at least one post-secondary degree.

A wide range of businesses participated, with food production and sales, souvenir sales, and hotels/attractions providing most of the responses. Telecommunications, manufacturing and finance were represented, while dive operators, crafts producers and transport operators were not. (Note: Craft Producers were approached to participate in the survey, but declined to do so.)

Respondents were mostly (almost 85%) the owners and/or managers of these businesses. Small businesses (1-5 employees) and large ones (over 30 employees) accounted for more than three quarters of the responses.

Twenty of the questionnaires contained enough information to determine a name and contact point (address, telephone or e-mail) for the respondent, while the remaining surveys were anonymous.

2. Awareness of the Park

Of the 26 responses, 23 had heard of the Montego Bay Marine Park. The three who had not were all in-bond merchants.

3. General environmental perceptions

Respondents were asked how strongly they agreed that proximity to the coastline and having healthy fish and coral reefs were important to their businesses. Not surprisingly, the highest level of agreement was returned by those who dealt most directly with tourists. There was near-unanimous agreement (23 of 26 responses) that the coastal environment was important to Montego Bay's economy. There was a similar degree of agreement that the fundamental quality of water (freedom from nutrients, chemicals and bacteria) was as important as its appearance.

On the question of whether the coastal environment was in good condition, only 20 respondents gave an answer, and only five of those fell on the positive side of neutral.

4. Negative impacts on the Park

Respondents were asked how strongly they agreed that a list of factors "have a negative impact on the Park". The pattern of responses was interesting but disturbing.

About three quarters of respondents (18 or 19 of 26) agreed or strongly agreed that sewage, solid waste and marine pollution (direct impacts) were threats. The remainder were mostly in the "don't know" or "strongly disagree" categories.

Asked about the negative impact of tourism, coastal development and urban development (indirect impacts), about the same number of respondents registered simple agreement but the numbers strongly agreeing fell to less than half. There appeared to be some resistance to the idea that tourism could have a negative impact, while the responses for coastal and urban development clustered around neutrality. Where do these people think sewage, solid waste and marine pollution come from?

5. Remedial actions

Respondents who answered these questions were unanimous in agreeing that education, scientific research and enforcement are important and necessary. However, a few (3 of 24) stopped short of giving Marine Park Rangers the power of arrest.

6. Management structure

There was strong but not overwhelming agreement that a single institution (rather than many) should be “responsible for managing marine resources”. There may have been some confusion about the exact meaning of “responsible”. However, we chose to consider these two questions mutually exclusive, and rejected two results that answered “yes” to both.

The next pair of questions produced an interesting pattern. Seventeen of the 25 responses agreed that some usage restrictions were needed, and wanted to be involved in decisions that could affect them. One more wanted to be involved but saw no need for restrictions, and six agreed with the idea of usage restrictions, but felt no need to be involved.

7. Investment in conservation

Most (90%) of respondents who answered this question were willing to make some gesture of support, even if it was just allowing MBMPT to set up a box for customer donations. Most (6 of 7) of the businesses involved directly in tourism expressed an interest in improving their environmental management systems, seeking environmental certification or both.

Respondents willing to support MBMPT want value for their money. Four suggested they would make donations in exchange for advertising, and seven would make a direct contribution to an activity of particular interest—five to Education, one to both Education and Science, and one to Enforcement.

8. Service expectations

The survey asked about the four most important services that should be offered by an organization such as MBMPT. Nineteen respondents gave at least a partial answer, and 14 of them listed “Education” as a top priority. This was closely followed by “Enforcement”, particularly with regard to fishing and pollution, and “Community participation” in activities such as gully clean-ups.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Adequacy of the sample

The sample is fairly representative of the area surveyed, both demographically and by type of business. However, it is too small for results to be more than suggestive. Sorting responses by age, education and industry segments produced very small groups, with few distinct differences.

There may also be an element of preaching to the choir. Those respondents that were willing to complete the questionnaire probably had some degree of environmental awareness and were at least philosophically supportive of the Marine Park.

2. Environmental attitudes

Clearly there is a great deal of work to be done teaching stakeholders (A) what constitutes a healthy coastal and marine environment, and (B) how important this is to public health, public safety, and local prosperity. The 16-30 age group, regardless of education level, seems to be in greatest need – this group returned more “don’t know” answers than any other.

Also, a lot of education is needed in simple responsibility, especially in tourism. There was a general refusal, especially among people directly involved, to accept that tourism and coastal development can have negative impacts on the Park. (It is worth noting that respondents with post-secondary education got this connection more consistently than those without.)

3. Management and service expectations

Responses to questions about stakeholder involvement in decision-making and the need for usage restrictions revealed a general wariness about environmental regulation. Nearly three quarters of the responses were “Yes” to both questions, suggesting (A) that usage restrictions applied without consultation and consensus-building will not get much voluntary compliance, and (B) that most stakeholders would prefer the restrictions applied to somebody else.

Respondents listing the four “Most important services” expected from the Marine Park Trust overwhelmingly chose some form of education. Clearly this is an area where our efforts need to be stepped up. Specific needs included tours and presentations for schools and community groups, printed material and informative signs, and help for businesses to understand and comply with environmental regulations.

4. Willingness to invest

We found a surprising degree of willingness to contribute in cash or by cooperation, but stakeholders want value for money. A few large enterprises would make no-strings donations in return for advertising, and there were indications of probable good support for a flat-out effort on education.

The idea of Green Globe/Blue Flag certification also generated some interest among hoteliers and attractions. These respondents have been flagged for speedy follow-up,

since this is an area where the Marine Park Trust can give valuable assistance without a large financial investment.