

Voluntary Standards as a Tool for Increasing the Sustainability of the Marine Recreation Industry and Improving MPA Effectiveness in Hawaii and Mesoamerica

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Standards have a long history of improving service quality and safety in a wide range of industries. Successful businesses benefit from standards both by actively participating in the standardization process and by using standards as strategic market instruments. The Coral Reef Alliance (CORAL) recently completed a process in which marine recreation industry stakeholders in Hawaii and along the Mesoamerican Barrier Reef worked in unprecedented collaborations to develop voluntary standards that will measurably improve and sustain environmental performance in scuba diving, snorkeling, boat operations, and marine life viewing. Engaging a standards committee comprised of representatives from marine recreation, conservation NGOs, tourism industry associations, marine recreation suppliers, marine park managers and government agencies, scientists, divers, local community groups, and traditional communities, CORAL is now testing the implementation of these standards and providing technical and financial support for locally based conservation initiatives. It is expected that this process will enhance adoption of standards throughout the marine recreation industry, increase industry support for marine protected areas (MPAs), and lead to the development of extensive conservation alliances which enhance MPA effectiveness and improve the economic and environmental sustainability of marine recreation in Hawaii and Mesoamerica.