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Tioman dive site set to be destroyed

BY TEOH TEIK HOONG AND
FLORENCE A. SAMY

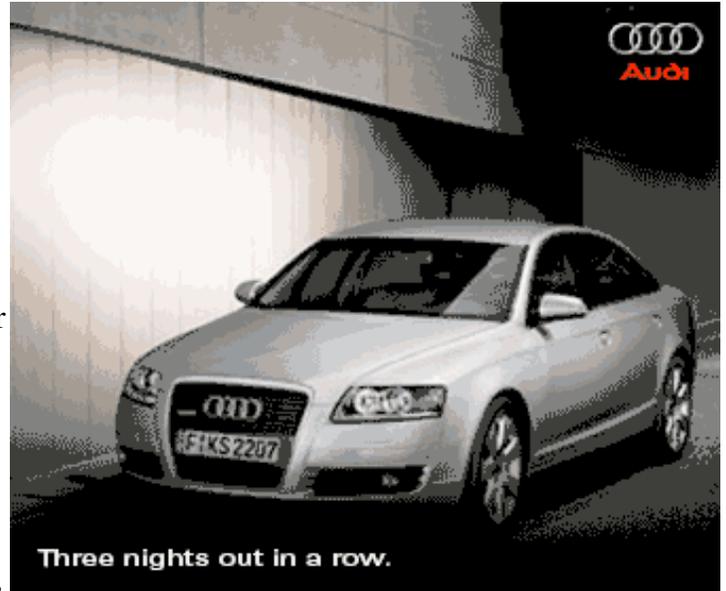
EXCLUSIVE

PETALING JAYA: One of the country's world-renowned marine dive sites just off Pulau Tioman is set to be destroyed to make way for a RM40mil marina project despite objections from environment authorities.

The marina, located off Kampung Tekek, is right in the middle of the marine park surrounding the island, which was once the top 10 most beautiful in the world.

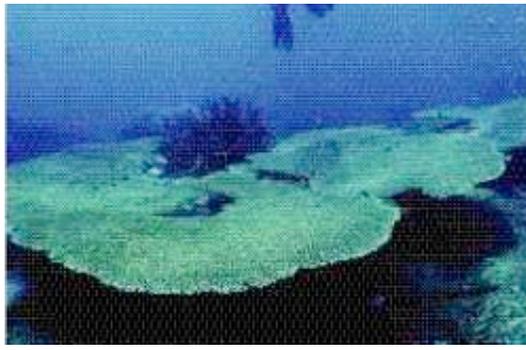
The project spans 127,000 sq metres and is expected to provide yacht docking areas, an administration building, water breakers and a cargo jetty which is expected to be 30m wide at the tip and stretches 175m into the sea.

The marina will threaten the survival of more than 200 endangered giant clams, 300-year-old corals and other marine life which thrive within it.



World-Renowned Coral Reef Under Siege





Several property including houses and chalets will also be acquired for the state project.

Not much else is known about the project except that its proponent is the Marine Department, which comes under the Transport Ministry, and that the project has been approved by the state government.

Natural Resources and Environment Ministry parliamentary secretary Sazmi Miah said the Marine Parks Department had recorded its objections to the project but had no authority to stop it as it was a state project.

“We are against any development in our marine parks and have recorded our objections to it in the EIA.

“However, now that the project is approved, it is the state's call,” he said.

Tioman, off the coast of Pahang, draws almost 14,000 divers annually to the 14 dive centres on the island.

The corals are just two metres from the surface of the water and only about five metres from the beach line.

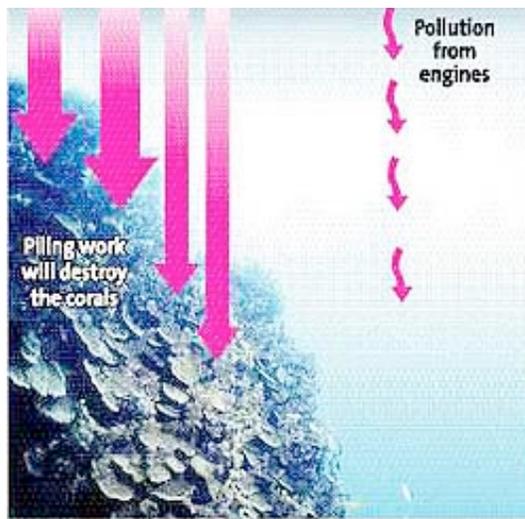
The livelihood of about 3,000 local residents are also at risk because of the project as they depend on the droves of divers and tourists going to the island to enjoy nature's wonders.

Local dive and chalet operators earn approximately RM14mil annually and claim that tourists and divers have told them that they will stay away if the project goes ahead.

Mohamad Sabri Nazri, a representative from the Tioman Budget Hotel Association, said villagers were puzzled as to how the authorities could sacrifice the area for a marina, which they feel was not needed.

“The project will displace many of us because the Government is acquiring our land adjacent to the marina,” he added.





He said the locals and the operators plan to hold a protest against the project this week.

WWF-Malaysia national programme director Dr Dionysius Sharma said the project should be stopped until proper assessment of the project's impact is carried out.

“The Fisheries Act states very clearly that living organisms, including corals, are protected in a marine park and it is an offence to kill or remove them,” he said.

A Marine Parks Department source said the department's jurisdiction was only the water and the living organisms up to two nautical miles from the shoreline.

However, the source said the seabed was still state land and it could not stop the project.

“Our role is only to ensure that mitigation measures are taken to minimise damage to the corals and marine life,” he added.

By press time yesterday, no comment could be obtained from the state government on the project.

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