

ABSTRAK

Perairan Teluk Saleh merupakan salah satu lokasi ekowisata Hiu Paus (*Rhincodon typus*) yang berlangsung sepanjang tahun. Tingginya interaksi wisatawan dengan Hiu Paus berpotensi memengaruhi perilaku biologis Hiu Paus, terutama jika terjadi pelanggaran kode etik ekowisata. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk mengkaji perilaku alami dan respon Hiu Paus terhadap perilaku wisatawan serta menilai efektivitas penerapan kode etik ekowisata di Teluk Saleh. Metode penelitian menggunakan observasi langsung pada Bulan April dan Juni yang mewakili periode kunjungan tinggi dan rendah. Data perilaku wisatawan dikategorikan berdasarkan tingkat kepatuhan terhadap kode etik, sedangkan respon Hiu Paus diamati untuk mengidentifikasi perubahan perilaku akibat stimulus yang diberikan wisatawan. Analisis dilakukan secara kuantitatif dengan membandingkan persentase pelanggaran dan respon antarperiode pengamatan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pada Bulan April dengan periode kunjungan tinggi terjadi peningkatan jumlah pelanggaran, terutama perilaku mendekat dan menyentuh tubuh Hiu Paus. Respon yang dominan adalah perubahan arah berenang, gerakan menghindar, dan penurunan durasi interaksi, yang mengindikasikan adanya gangguan terhadap perilaku alami Hiu Paus. Efektivitas kode etik dinilai belum optimal, terutama pada periode kunjungan tinggi. Penelitian ini merekomendasikan pembatasan jumlah wisatawan, peningkatan edukasi, dan pengawasan ketat sebagai upaya mendukung pengelolaan ekowisata Hiu Paus yang berkelanjutan.

Kata Kunci: *Ekowisata, Hiu Paus (Rhincodon typus), kode etik, perilaku wisatawan, respon perilaku, Teluk Saleh.*

ABSTRACT

The waters of Teluk Saleh are a year-round location for ecotourism with whale sharks (*Rhincodon typus*). The high intensity of tourist-whale shark interactions has the potential to affect the biological behavior of the sharks, especially when the ecotourism code of conduct is violated. This study examines the natural behavior of whale sharks and their responses to tourists, as well as the effectiveness of implementing the ecotourism code of conduct in Teluk Saleh. Direct observations were conducted in April and June, representing high and low visitation periods, respectively. Data on tourist behavior were categorized based on compliance with the code of conduct, and whale shark responses were observed to identify behavioral changes caused by tourist stimuli. A quantitative analysis was conducted by comparing the percentage of violations and responses between observation periods. Results showed that the number of violations increased during the high visitation period in April, particularly behaviors such as approaching too closely and touching the whale shark's body. The dominant responses were changes in swimming direction, avoidance movements, and reduced interaction duration, indicating disruptions to the whale sharks' natural behavior. The code of conduct's effectiveness was deemed suboptimal, particularly during peak visitation periods. This study recommends limiting tourist numbers, increasing educational efforts, and implementing stricter monitoring to support the sustainable management of whale shark ecotourism.

Keywords: Behavioral response, code of conduct, ecotourism, Saleh Bay, tourist behavior, Whale shark (*Rhincodon typus*).

