

Living with the Sea:

Local Perspectives on the Ocean, Tourism and Livelihoods

Field findings based on 28 interviews with local residents in the villages of Labuhan Amuk, Padang Bai, Pengalon, and Tanah Ampo.

Village Profiles

These villages were selected because they highly differ in their degree of tourism development compared to Padang Bai, allowing for a comparison of local perceptions across different coastal villages.

PADANG BAI AND SURROUNDING VILLAGES

Karangasem Regency, Bali



Padang Bai

- **Inhabitants:** 3,720 (2024)
- **Economic activities:** Tourism, transportation, fisheries, and hospitality.
- **Tourism:** Highly touristic, serving as one of Bali's main departure points for fast boats to Lombok, the Gili Islands, and Nusa Penida.
- **Characteristics:** A busy harbour town with a well-developed tourism sector, dive centres, restaurants, and accommodations

Labuhan Amuk

- **Inhabitants:** 1,212 (June, 2026)
- **Economic activities:** Fisheries and small-scale tourism.
- **Tourism:** Not a major tourist destination, although it is known locally for snorkeling and coral restoration initiatives.
- **Characteristics:** A coastal village with a strong connection to the marine environment and community-based conservation activities

Pengalon

- **Inhabitants:** 1,911 (May, 2026)
- **Main occupation:** Fishing, with some residents working in tourism or abroad (e.g., on cruise ships).
- **Tourism:** Limited; tourism mainly consists of recreational fishing; no tourism infrastructure
- **Characteristics:** A traditional fishing village where livelihoods remain closely tied to the sea, no coral restoration possible due to strong currents

Tanah Ampo

- **Inhabitants:** 1,213 (June, 2026)
- **Main occupations:** Farming and fishing.
- **Tourism:** Limited; tourism mainly consists of recreational fishing; no tourism infrastructure
- **Characteristics:** A predominantly rural coastal community with an economy based on agriculture and fisheries, complemented by maritime infrastructure.

Methodology

This research project used a qualitative approach based on semi-structured interviews with residents from the villages of Labuhan Amuk, Padang Bai, Pengalon, and Tanah Ampo. Residents in each village from different occupations were interviewed, including fishermen, restaurant owners, taxi drivers, farmers and dive professionals, to be representative of the village population.

The participants were selected through a mix of purposive and snowball sampling. Potential interviewees were either approached in public spaces, such as the harbour area or the beach, or were introduced by other community members.

Objectives

The objective of this study was to gain a better understanding how local communities perceive community challenges, tourism and the importance of the ocean. In addition, the study explored broader community perspectives on coral conservation, waste management, and livelihoods to identify opportunities for sustainable development.

Field Findings: Community Challenges

Waste management remains one of the most pressing challenges identified by local residents across the four villages. While Padang Bai and Tanah Ampo benefit from a regular waste management system, while this service is not available in Labuhan Amuk and Pengalon. Residents manage organic waste by turning it into fertilizer, but for other types of waste, burning remains the only available solution.

	Plastic Waste	Organic Waste
Padang Bai	Pick up every 2-3 days	Pick up every 2-3 days
Labuhan Amuk	Burned	Used to make fertilizer
Pengalon	Burned	Used to make fertilizer
Tanah Ampo	Pick up every Sunday	Used to make fertilizer

This challenge is further intensified during the rainy season, when rivers carry waste from surrounding areas into the ocean. The waste is then washed ashore to the beach, causing additional pollution.

THIS IS THE RESULT:



In order to address the waste problem, so-called “*gotong royong*” are organized by either POKWASMAS (Community Monitoring Group) or the *desa dinas* (administrative village government), which are community clean-ups. In these activities, the village comes together to collect waste and burn it afterwards, in order to keep their environment clean. **However, this is only a complementary solution.** Moreover, people tend to pick up the large trash but there is also the smaller trash, like microplastics or the styrofoam which fragments into small pieces. One of the residents said the following: “Because usually during the beach clean-up, I pick up the small trash because nobody is picking it up. Sure, maybe people say that I am doing the “easy” trash, but the easy trash is always the ignored one.”

Definition *Gotong royong*:

It is a traditional Indonesian value meaning mutual cooperation, where community members work together to achieve a common goal without expecting personal gain. It reflects solidarity, unity, and togetherness.



In the context of waste management, residents also highlighted policy and funding challenges. According to interviewees, households are now expected to manage their own waste, while the village is no longer permitted to establish a landfill (TPA). In Pengalon for example, the village had planned to build a waste processing facility, the project was never implemented because the necessary funding from the government was not disbursed.

As a fisherman, the income is uncertain; sometimes I earn something, *sometimes I don't.*

- Resident in Labuhan Amuk

Another major challenge are unstable livelihoods. Most residents have two to three jobs to sustain their families. These are the three main reasons:

01 Uncertain Fishing Income

Fishing provides an important source of income for the majority of the village residents, but it is highly unpredictable. Fishermen often return without a catch while still having to cover fuel costs, and rough weather can prevent them from going to sea. In Tanah Ampo, residents also reported declining numbers in fish due to coral damage caused by boat anchors.

02 Lasting Economic Impact of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in significant job losses across the tourism and hospitality sector. Many residents lost their livelihoods, and described the economic recovery as slow, including consistently lower numbers of visiting tourists, with some households still struggling to regain stable employment.

03 Climate Challenges for Agriculture

Agriculture has become increasingly difficult during prolonged dry periods. Residents reported that drought has led to crop failures, with coconut trees and other plants dying due to a lack of rainfall, reducing agricultural productivity and household income.



Fisherman from Labuhan Amuk

Interviewees also highlighted the impact of reduced village budgets on local development. According to one village head, the **village's allocation from the central government decreased from approximately one billion rupiah to 375 million rupiah under President Prabowo's administration.** The interviewee attributed this reduction to the government's prioritization of national programmes, including the *Koperasi Merah Putih* initiative and the MBG (Free Nutritious Meals) programme. Residents expressed concern that these budget cuts have limited the village's ability to invest in local priorities, such as waste management and other community projects.

1.000.000.000 IDR



375.000.000 IDR

This is a 62.5% decrease from the original budget.

Strategic Recommendations

The challenges identified by the respective communities are complex and shaped by wider economic, political, and structural factors that Livingseas cannot address alone. The following recommendations therefore focus on realistic actions where Livingseas can create meaningful impact and support improvements in local livelihoods:

1. Spreading Awareness to Reduce Coral Damage from Harmful Anchoring Practices

- Residents highlighted difficulties in monitoring and preventing coral damage caused by fast boat anchoring
- Strengthen collaboration with POKWASMAS to support reef monitoring and reporting of harmful anchoring practices
- Collaborate with fast boat operators to raise awareness about responsible anchoring methods and the importance of protecting coral reefs
- Promote the use of alternative anchoring solutions to reduce direct damage to coral ecosystems

2. Reducing Waste Originating from Local Rivers Entering the Ocean

- Explore solutions to prevent waste from being transported through rivers into the ocean, particularly during the rainy season
- Assess opportunities for river waste collection systems or barriers to capture waste before it reaches coastal areas
- Collaborate with local communities to participate in “*goyong-royong*” activities

3. Exploring Alternative Funding Options for Sustainable Tourism Development

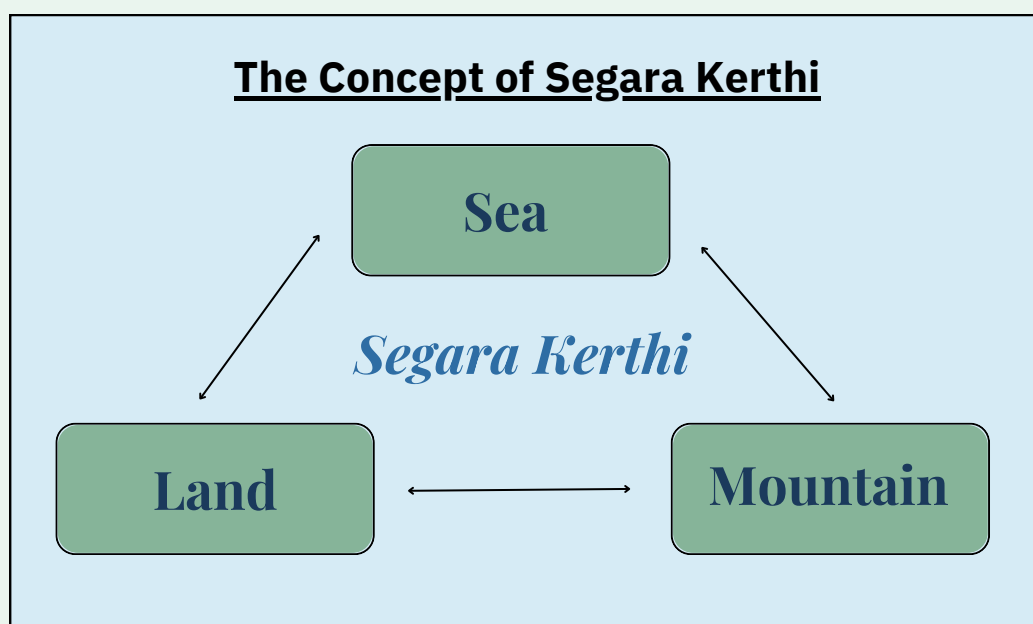
- To support the development of tourism infrastructure, such as accommodation facilities, attractions and restaurants, in Labuhan Amuk, Pengalon and Tanah Ampo
- Identify potential partnerships with private investors, tourism operators, or development organizations to support sustainable tourism projects
- Promote cultural tourism initiatives highlighting local traditions, temples and ceremonies



Field Findings: The Importance of the Ocean

Throughout the interviews, it became evident how essential the ocean is to the daily lives of local residents. It is not only a main source of income through fishing, and different forms of tourism, such as diving, snorkeling, and fast boats, but also an important place for recreation, with many residents regularly swimming and engaging in recreational fishing in the sea. **Beyond its economic and recreational value, the ocean holds deep spiritual significance in Balinese Hinduism**, serving as the site for many cremation ceremonies and other religious rituals. As one village head expressed:

“In Balinese Hinduism there is a concept called *Segara Kerthi*. It means that the sea has a strategic position. There are the sea, the mountains, and the land—these are three concepts in Balinese Hinduism: mountains, land, and the sea. There is the upstream, the middle, and the end. There is the past, the present, and the future. The sea represents the future. In Hindu belief, this is connected with reincarnation. In the Hindu concept, the sea is the first and the last. Therefore, life in the sea is very important. The sea also has land, the sea also has mountains, the sea also has life, and the sea also has its own voice. The sea is like a chain—it has no beginning and no end. Therefore, the sea is the mother of life. The earth is the sea, the mountains are the sea. In the end, everything returns to the sea. The sea is extremely important. The sea is life.”



This graphic visualizes the **three roles of the ocean** for local residents:



Low awareness of coral restoration projects.

With the exception of fishermen, who interact with the marine environment through their work, many interviewees were unfamiliar with coral restoration efforts in their own and neighboring villages. This suggests that coral reefs may not be a visible part of everyday life for many community members, highlighting the importance of awareness and education alongside restoration activities.

Traditional knowledge is slowly disappearing.

Residents described how traditional knowledge connected to the ocean is gradually disappearing. Practices such as traditional fishing and salt-making, once passed down through generations, are increasingly being replaced by modern methods and other forms of employment. As younger generations pursue jobs in tourism, cities, or abroad, there is a growing risk that this knowledge and connection to traditional marine livelihoods will be lost. Particularly in Tanah Ampo and Pengalon, many young adults work on cruise ships or go abroad to Japan or Turkey, in the hope for a higher salary.

Strategic Recommendations

1. Increase Awareness of Livingseas' Coral Restoration Efforts

- Develop educational materials explaining why coral reefs matter for livelihoods and the wider marine ecosystem
- Organize community events or short information sessions where residents can learn about the restoration project and its local benefits
- Involve local fishermen in sharing their experiences and knowledge of changes in the marine environment

2. Preserve and Share Traditional Marine Knowledge

- Document traditional knowledge from older fishermen and other residents about sustainable fishing practices before it is lost
- Create opportunities for older residents to share this knowledge with younger generations through community workshops and school activities
- Explore whether elements of traditional marine knowledge could be incorporated into community-based or cultural tourism
- Connect traditional knowledge with conservation by allowing local fishermen to contribute their observations of changes in fish populations, seasons, and marine conditions

Conclusion

This research showed how the ocean is deeply embedded in the lives of coastal communities. It provides livelihoods, supports cultural and spiritual practices, offers recreational opportunities, and represents an important part of local identity. At the same time, residents are facing increasing pressures on these connections, including uncertain fishing incomes, rising fuel costs, environmental degradation, limited tourism opportunities, and inadequate waste management.

The research also highlights an opportunity for Livingseas to strengthen the connection between marine conservation and community livelihoods. Awareness of coral restoration remains limited among many residents, particularly those who do not work directly with the ocean. Greater community involvement, education and communication could help residents understand how coral reef conservation relates to the fisheries, tourism and wider marine environment on which communities depend.

“Coral restoration is not only an environmental issue. *It is also about protecting the livelihoods, knowledge and future opportunities of the communities that depend on it.*”