The National Reform Council (NRC) on Monday voted to seriously push Thailand's Andaman coast to become a World Heritage site for conservation and tourism.

The beach of Trang province may one day become part of World Heritage as the National Reform Council resolves to push for international recognition of Thailand's Andaman coast. (Photo by Peerawat Jariyasombat)

The members voted on Monday 196-2 in favour, with seven abstentions.

Before the vote, Pramote Maiklad, head of the NRC's committee on natural resources and the environment, told the council that the upgrade of the coast would be a "quick-win" reform as it had a unique shoreline and ecosystem, which bring the country tourism revenue of 300-400 billion baht annually.

"In the past 10 years, the Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation planned to propose it as a World Heritage site to the Unesco and it has been on the Tentative List since 2004. But it's a pity the proposal has not been seriously supported," Mr Pramote said.

He also said that all concerned agencies were now ready to support the idea and it was time the NRC pushed it for national interest.

"Benefits will go to all six southern provinces on the Andaman Sea. This covers 17 marine national parks and one wildlife sanctuary, a combined marine area of more than 10,000 square kilometres. It will be the first
marine World Heritage site of Thailand," Mr Pramote said, referring to Phangnga, Phuket, Krabi, Trang, Ranong and Satun provinces.

As a world heritage, the Andaman coast would benefit from natural resource research and efficient management, he said.

"Thailand will receive considerable support and ecotourism will substantially expand," Mr Pramote said.

If the project is delayed, marine resources including coral reefs will deteriorate by both nature and men, he warned.

Thon Thamrongnawasawat, a marine biologist and member of the NRC’s natural resources and environmental committee, said it could take about three years for the proposal to be in the consideration process.

"Whether it will be a World Heritage site or not has not yet been important to me. The problem is that we’ve never been able to stop the destruction of marine natural resources and to seriously integrate tourism promotion and environmental conservation. This is proposed to stop the ongoing destruction," Mr Thon said.