

POLICY BRIEF – *Save the Reefs in the Philippines... Save their Souls*



Source: <http://www.zoochat.com/1056/coral-reef-philippine-coral-reef-main-220469/>

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The coral reefs of the Philippines are suffering a tremendous decline in quality and sustainability. As coral reef areas are among the most greatly threatened areas around the world, it is concerning to know that over 70% of these areas in the Philippines are in a state of “poor” or “fair” quality.¹

INTRODUCTION

Surveys conducted in the country’s islands since the 1970’s have recorded an increasing decline in coral reef condition over the past few decades, largely due to two main factors, which continue to threaten the success of coral reefs in the Philippines today: overfishing and destructive fishing practices. Other threats that are not as serious (but should not be ignored) include tourism, overpopulation, pollution, and coastal development. As nearly 45% of the country’s population lives on a coast within 30 kilometers of a coral reef,² it is essential to start building a more sustainable way to maintain fisheries and have less destructive fishing practices. These issues can be addressed through the establishment of more marine protected areas (MPAs), conducting more surveys for monitoring fisheries and resource availability, education campaigns, and through support from both the national and local governments of the Philippines.



Source: <http://www.worldfishcenter.org>

APPROACHES

Currently, the harvest rate of Philippine fisheries is about 30 percent higher than the maximum sustainable yield, which was already reached over 20 years ago in some areas.³ If this rate of overfishing is keeps up, the resource stock in the country will eventually deplete, and numerous people will be unemployed. About two million residents depend on fisheries for employment, as the Philippines are a major fish supplier to the live reef food fish trade (LRFFT) industry in Asia-Pacific.² Destructive fishing practices, such as capturing immature fish and chemical fishing are also factors in diminishing the livelihood of coral reefs.



Source: www.hngn.com

To deal with the issue of overfishing, a large number of small MPAs in the Philippines have been set up and spread out among the different islands, and are managed by local government units. Larger MPAs are supported by the national government. Surveys, however, have reported that out of 200 MPA's surveyed, 175 of them were rated as "partially effective" or "ineffective."² Thus, surveys need to be conducted more often and in a wider range of areas, so as to increase awareness of the issue. This would aid in monitoring the management of fisheries and MPAs, and hence resource availabilities. As awareness is increased, more MPAs can be established, along with proper management practices.

With regard to destructive fishing practices, programs that educate workers on proper fishery management practices should be implemented. For current fisheries, surveys should be conducted more regularly to ensure correct practices. Furthermore, both national and local governments need to implement stricter laws along with more consequential fines, regarding water pollution. This holds strong especially for pollution from agricultural runoff and erosion from deforested areas.



Source: www.coraltriangleinitiative.org

RESULTS Efforts of effective enforcement and compliance towards better practices and management of MPAs in the Philippines are improving, despite the ongoing challenge the people have faced. A survey from 2007 demonstrated that the enforcement of fishing regulations at MPAs had advanced since 2000.² Also, national targets for MPA coverage were set multiple times, in the span of over a decade. This coverage, however, has room for improvement.

CONCLUSION

Coral reefs and fisheries associated with them have helped maintain a livelihood for a great portion of the coastal population of the Philippines.⁴ The most crucial step that the Philippines national government can take regarding this issue of reef decline is to raise awareness. On a smaller scale, the local governments should work together with communities in participating in additional resource management projects and implement education campaigns on marine protected areas and the importance of their economic benefits. In turn, these actions will elicit good habits, as the local people of the Philippines are then more likely to be motivated to preserve coral reefs and the sustainability of the country's fishing industry.



Source: www.coastalnewstoday.com

¹ Philippine Clearing House Mechanism for Biodiversity, "Coastal, Marine and Island Biodiversity: Coral Reefs," 2009, http://www.chm.ph/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=92%3Acoastal-marine-and-island-biodiversity-coral-reefs-&catid=36%3Abiodiversity-in-the-philippines&Itemid=92 (accessed November 26, 2013)

² Laretta Burke, "Reefs at Risk: Revisited in the Coral Triangle," *World Resources Institute*, 2012

³ WorldFish, "Increasing Food Security in the Philippines through Aquaculture," 2013, <http://www.worldfishcenter.org/our-research/ongoing-projects/increasing-food-security-philippines-aquaculture> (accessed November 26, 2013)

⁴ Alan T. White and Helge P. Vogt, "Philippine Coral Reefs Under Threat: Lessons Learned After 25 Years of Community-Based Reef Conservation," *Marine Pollution Bulletin* Vol. 40, No. 6, pp. 537-550, 2000