



CAN-096-Coral Reefs Crisis-Philippines

Join WFCRC

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Coral reefs crisis

By [BusinessMirror Editorial](#)

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By next year the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and the Department of Science and Technology (DOST) would be finished with their nationwide coral reef assessment, a joint project they call the National Coral Reef Status.

What they have gathered so far, though, does not seem promising.

Their studies seem to indicate only 20 percent of all coral reef systems in the country are alive, while 80 percent are dead coral because of illegal fishing and water pollution. According to local scientists, Tubbataha Reef remains the only largest coral reef system in the country that is alive.

A BusinessMirror story quoted equally dismal results of another study. Dr. Porfirio Alino of the University of the Philippines Marine Science Institute found that only 5 percent—equivalent to just around 1,000 square kilometers—of the country's total reef area remain in good condition in the face of wanton destruction of our coral reefs by poachers.

Our coral reefs are endangered. This is old news. It's easy to rant about how awful and terrible all this is but what are we going to do? This is the real question.

In a country that has one of the largest reef areas in the Southeast Asia region and which is supposedly the center of marine biodiversity in the world, the horrifying degradation of our coral reefs is downright unforgivable; especially since, on paper, it seems we've got enough laws and regulations to protect our marine environment.

Local government units under the Local Government Code are authorized to protect the waters within their jurisdictions. We've got the National Integrated Protected Areas System Act, as well as a National Marine Policy that complies with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. The Philippine Fisheries Code has established fish sanctuaries or marine-protected areas (MPAs) all over the country. We also have the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR), which is responsible for the development, improvement, management and conservation of the country's fisheries and aquatic resources.

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However, despite all these duly constituted government authorities, all these laws and regulations, enforcement has been found severely wanting, quite obviously. Why is that? Do we need to amend laws and introduce new ones that have more teeth? Do we lack the political will to implement these laws without interference or manipulation?

We urge Congress to provide government agencies mandated to protect our marine environment more funds so that they could do their jobs well and to strengthen laws protecting our country's biodiversity.

We urge President Duterte to strongly take action before our life-supporting coral reefs are lost forever. The country's coastal and marine resources require investments of at least 1 percent of GDP to improve efforts to safeguard them and ensure their sustainable development.

Alino pointed out, for instance, that of the more than 600 MPAs that have been established in the country, only around 10 percent were actually being managed effectively. He said the capability of national government agencies to act decisively on marine problems appears to have diminished in recent years. He said there's a need to provide more support "to enhance their capacity to provide technical assistance and improve their capability to fight crimes against our natural heritage".

More funding would not only provide for better law enforcement and regulation but, just as important, would boost our resource managers' capability to start rebuilding damaged coral reefs, which science says is doable. Coral reefs are considered the "rainforests of the sea" and are integral to the livelihoods and well-being of our people. They not only provide protection from erosion and storm damage but could also generate income through ecotourism and fishing.

The government with the help of our people and the private sector could still reverse the destructive impacts of overfishing, water pollution, poaching and climate change.

Hopefully, it is not too late to prevent the extinction of our coral reefs.

For additional reading see [The WFCRC Document Gallery](#) for articles about:

- Public Service Announcements (PSA)
- Coral Alert Network (CAN)
- Emergency Reporting Reports (ERR)
- Call to Action (CTA)
- Marine Protected Areas (MPA)
- Marine Life Alert (MLA)
- Seismic and Oil Production Threats
- Natural Science Reports (NSR)
- Oil Spill Alerts (OSA)
- And other miscellaneous documents

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