

Sulu Sulawesi Marine Ecoregion

Written by

Thursday, 10 November 2011 11:30 - Last Updated Wednesday, 16 November 2011 15:23

The Sulu and Celebes Seas comprise the Sulu-Celebes Sea Large Marine Ecosystem (LME), an area of about 900,000 square kilometers of marine resources¹. The expanse covered by these two seas, also called the Sulu-Sulawesi Marine Ecoregion (SSME), is partially divided by a chain of small islands known as the Sulu Archipelago. A large portion of the LME is located in the midst of three ASEAN nations – Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines. The seascape is characterized by a tropical climate, tepid waters, and complex and wide-ranging biophysical characteristics and oceanography that contribute to its exceptionally abundant marine biodiversity. However, the SSME has porous borders acting like a magnet to threats of piracy and illegal fishing (e.g., cyanide and blast fishing), which contributes considerably to its environmental degradation

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. The over-exploitation of marine resources, population pressure, and pollution further undermine its rich legacy

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The multi-gear and multi-species fisheries of this marine ecoregion provide sustenance and livelihood to some 35 million people. Fishing in the area has been reported to be excessive and destructive, and has resulted to declining catches and reduced economic returns, changes in fish population structures, depleted coral reefs, and heightened threats to rare and endangered species.

Conservation initiatives in the ecoregion have been taken up by the WWF (i.e., the Sulu Sulawesi Marine Ecoregion Conservation Program, launched in 1999) and the Conservation International (i.e., Sulu Sulawesi Seascape Initiative 2005-2010)

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Both NGOs have strategically mobilized the establishment of marine protected areas, accompanied by law enforcement support in priority conservation areas, otherwise known as marine biodiversity conservation corridors (MBCCs). As a result, networks of MPAs have been established, including the social network of MPAs in the Verde Island Passage Corridor and the network of Marine Turtle Protected Areas in the Sea Turtle Corridor.

A 2009 report on the Sulu Sulawesi Seascape (SSS) indicated that the SSS initiative has contributed to the expansion of the total 'no-take' zone in three corridors of the seascape (i.e., the Verde Island Passage, the Cagayan Ridge and the Tri-national Sea Turtle Corridor) to 1,476 square kilometers, placing a total of 1,624 square kilometers under management (Figure 28). The SSS initiative also played a part in the updated mapping of Priority Sites for Conservation in the Philippines, which is a major contribution to the Philippines' Clearing-House Mechanism (discussed separately in this report under Institutional Initiatives), which will set the trend for similar undertakings in the ASEAN region.

[See Map of Sulu Sulawesi Marine Ecoregion](#)

Endnotes

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DeVantier, Lyndon, Angel Alcala and Clive Wilkinson. 2004. The Sulu-Sulawesi Sea: Environmental and Socioeconomic Status, Future Prognosis and Ameliorative Policy Options. *Ambio* Vol. 33 No. 1–2, Feb. 2004

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DeVantier et al. 2004.

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3

Sulu Sulawesi Seascape Website accessed on 23 March 2010 at <http://www.conservation.org.ph/ss>

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Sulu Sulawesi Seascape Website,

ibid

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Source

ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity 2010. ASEAN Biodiversity Outlook, pp 121-122. Los Banos Laguna, Philippines 2010.