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KORANADAL CITY – Fourteen (14) more whale sharks (*Rhincodon typus*) were recently found in Sarangani Bay as the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) has taken note that the Philippines has emerged as the country with the second largest habitat of the endangered marines species, locally called “butanding”.

The whales were discovered last March 9 in the waters off Silway near General Santos City, that brought to 16 the total number of whale sharks spotted in Sarangani Bay since 2014, officials of DENR Region 12 said in a statement.

“The recent documentation of whale sharks in Sarangani Bay made the Philippines as the second largest known population of whale sharks in the world, according to the Wildbook for Whale Sharks, a global online library providing visual database of whale shark encounters around the world,” the DENR-12 statement said.

The DENR-12, through its GenSan -based Task Force Butanding, forwarded corresponding data to the Large Marine Vertebrates (LAMAWE) Research Institute for individual tagging of the 14 whale sharks.

Australia, which the LAMAWE named earlier as the second largest habitat of whale sharks, has been overtaken by the Philippines with the March 9 discovery. Mexico waters remain as the world’s top whale sharks habitat, the DENR statement said.

“The Philippines’ (rise) to the number two spot highlights (its) global significance...for the endangered species and emphasizes the country as a conservation leader for the species in South East Asia,” it added.

The butanding has been spotted in Donsol, Sorsogon; Oslob, Cebu; Pintuyan, Southern Leyte; and Honda Bay in Palawan.

DENR-12 Regional Executive Director Nilo Tamoria commended members of the Task Force Butanding Gensan for their latest feat. The task force is a composite team responsible for the protection and conservation of whale sharks.

“We should intensify our information drive to the community on the presence of whale sharks in the area and the prohibited acts as stipulated in Republic Act 9147 or the Wildlife Resources Conservation and Protection Act and other related laws,” Tamoria was quoted as telling the task force members.

Sarangani Gov. Steve Chiongbian-Solon ordered the Environmental Conservation and Protection Center (ECPC) to lead the research team together with DENR and local government units to gather relevant data that would help in the conservation and protection of whale sharks.

Dr. Roy Operario Mejorada of the ECPC said his team’s daily monitoring of whale shark sightings and documenting their behaviors have drawn supports from various quarters.

General Santos City Councilor Shandee Llido, Protected Area Superintendent Joy Ologuin and Dr. Rosalinda Cortez of the DENR-Saragani office were reported working on another ordinance declaring the General Santos City waters as a critical habitat of the whale sharks.

<https://news.mb.com.ph/2019/03/11/ph-now-the-second-largest-habitat-of-whale-sharks-dnr/>