

Tubbataha Reefs designation as sensitive sea area approved

By Pia Lee-Brago (The Philippine Star) | Updated August 3, 2017 - 12:00am

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MANILA, Philippines - The Marine Environment Protection Committee (MEPC) of the International Maritime Organization (IMO) has finally approved the Philippine application for the designation of Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park as a particularly sensitive sea area (PSSA).

The designation of Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park was approved with the adoption of the MEPC Resolution on the TRNP in the Sulu Sea PSSA.

The committee, at its 71st session from July 3 to 7, adopted the resolution during its final plenary session acting on the recommendation of the technical group on PSSAs.

In adopting the resolution, the MEPC 71 took note “of the ecological criteria, in particular relating to uniqueness or rarity, naturalness, diversity and fragility, and the socio-economic and scientific criteria of the Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park as well as its vulnerability to damage by international shipping activities and the steps taken by the Philippines to address that vulnerability.”

The MEPC 71 adopted earlier the recommendation of the IMO Maritime Safety Committee approving Tubbataha as an area to be avoided by all types of ships with at least 150 gross tonnage. The ATBA is aimed at minimizing the risk of damage from running aground and pollution by international shipping activities and to protect the area’s unique and threatened species as well as to preserve its critical habitat and diversity.

The resolution stated that mariners should exercise extreme care when navigating the area bounded by geographical coordinates of the PSSA and adhere to the ATBA.

The ATBA for the PSSA will take effect on Jan. 1, 2018 based on an IMO Safety of Navigation Circular.

In the resolution designating the region surrounding the TRNP as a PSSA, the MEPC invites IMO member governments to recognize the ecological, socio-economic and scientific criteria of the Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park area as well as its vulnerability to damage from international shipping activities. The MEPC also invites member governments to note the ATBA to address the area’s vulnerability.

<http://www.philstar.com/science-and-environment/2017/08/03/1724061/tubbataha-reefs-designation-sensitive-sea-area-approved>