

# Sarangani Bay Protected Seascape teeming with coastal, marine life

By [Jonathan L. Mayuga](#)

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Sarangani Bay's scenic feature

Sarangani Bay was put in the spotlight recently when reports that hundreds of whales and dolphins showed up while a team from the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) in the province was conducting a marine mammal census.

Little is known about Sarangani Bay. This magnificent seascape is a rich body of water and home to the tuna industry in the Philippines.

It is teeming with coastal and marine life, enough to be included as one of the 94 protected areas covered by the Expanded National Integrated Protected Area System Act.

## Protected seascape



Corals and fishes waiting to be discovered within the Sarangani Bay Protected Seascape

On March 5, the Sarangani Bay Protected Seascape (SBPS) will mark its 25th year.

In 1996, then-President Fidel V. Ramos signed Proclamation 756, establishing Sarangani Bay and a portion of the municipal waters of Maitum, Kiamba and Maasim in the province of Sarangani, as a protected seascape, in order to protect and maintain its coastal and marine resources for the benefit of the Filipino people.

The SBPS has a total of area of 215,950 hectares and is shared by a total of 68 coastal barangays from the towns of Maitum, Kiamba and Maasim, and the towns of Alabel, Malapatan, and Glan; and General Santos City,

The stretch of Sarangani Bay covers a total of 224 kilometers. It is host to the General Santos City Fish Port Complex, numerous fishing villages, beach resorts, a coal energy power plant, shipyards, marine parks and sanctuaries and aquaculture farms.

As host to one of the country's most important cities and ports, Sarangani Bay, from which the province was named when it was created in 1992, is one of the Soccsksargen Region's most economically important bodies of water.

## Biological features



Sunset over mangrove area

According to the DENR-Region 12 and the Provincial Environment and Natural Resources Office (Penro) of Sarangani, its coastline is teeming with diverse species of mangrove.

There are a total of 27 mangrove species and 9 associate species within the SBPS.

Among the most dominant species of mangroves in the area are the pagatpat, bungalon and bakawan.

The SBPS also hosts a total of 11 species of seagrass, that is dominated by the locally known "miki."

There are also 411 reef species in Sarangani Bay.

## **Socioeconomic and cultural profile**

There are several indigenous tribes within the SBPS. These include the Blaan, Tagakaolo, T'boli, Manobo, Kalagan and Maguindanaos.

They are described as some of the most hospitable and fun-loving Sarangans or people of Sarangani.

They engage in indigenous music and cook a scrumptious feast of local delicacies. More importantly, the DENR said the intricate craftsmanship of their mat-weaving and beadwork is “marvelous.”

## **Threatened species**

The SBPS is home to many threatened species—such as dugong, mameng, or the Napoleon wrasse, and four species of marine turtles namely hawksbill, olive ridley, loggerhead and green sea turtle.

Other notable fauna include dolphins, whales, sunfish, giant clams, and shorebirds, most of which are threatened.

Despite that, the area is frequented by marine mammals, like whales and dolphins, which make it uniquely interesting.

## **Garbage woes**

Sarangani Bay, like most coastal areas in various parts of the country, is affected by menacing garbage.

“The garbage is not from the coastal communities but from inland,” said Joy C. Ologuin, the Protected Area Superintendent of SBPS.

She said the tons of garbage indiscriminately dumped by irresponsible residents end up in waterways and, during heavy downpours, are swept away by the raging river down to the river deltas, accumulating in Sarangani Bay.

“That is why we are working with the LGUs and the private sector to do something about it,” she said.

A proposal, she said, is to put up garbage traps in strategic locations along creeks and rivers so that the garbage will no longer reach the coastal area.

“The garbage traps will prevent garbage from going to the bay. The solid waste will just be collected from the traps,” she said partly in Filipino.

## **Awareness campaign**

Oloquin said the DENR, in partnership with various stakeholders, continues to conduct information, education and communication campaigns in Sarangani to highlight the importance of protecting and conserving Sarangani Bay.

She said there is a need to strengthen the information drive in various parts of the province, especially those in communities along rivers that lead out to Sarangani Bay, to educate them about proper solid waste management that continue to threaten the livelihood of fishing communities and the coastal and marine ecosystem of the province.

If unchecked, she said the garbage problem, particularly plastic pollution in Sarangani Bay, will take its toll on the province’s precious marine wildlife—which include the mangroves, seagrass, and corals.

## **Tourism potential**

The provincial government of Sarangani has high hopes in turning Sarangani Bay into a tourism hub, with whale- and dolphin-watching among the main attractions.

Little is known that Sarangani Bay has potential for diving and snorkelling, with unique species of corals and reef fishes, waiting to be discovered.

“That is why we really want to protect Sarangani Bay and keep its water as clean as possible all the time,” Oloquin said.

## Simple celebration

Because of the pandemic, a simple but meaningful celebration of SBPS's 25th year on March 5 is being prepared by the DENR along with the provincial government of Sarangani, towns and coastal barangays.

"It was decided by the Protected Area Management Board to make the celebration as simple as possible," Ologuin told the BusinessMirror in a telephone interview on February 22.

Nevertheless, she said the celebration, although it will have a limited number of participants, will be meaningful because all sectors will be appropriately represented. The events aim to encourage audience participation, especially among the coastal communities.

"We really want this to make it known to all that the Sarangani Bay is a protected seascape, because some people are still not aware of it," she said.

Hopefully, she said the event will eventually see the declaration of March 5 as a local holiday in General Santos City and the entire Sarangani province.

## Bike and Plant

This year's celebration will kick off on February 28 with the launching of the "Bike and Plant" events at the Oval Plaza.

From General Santos City, there will be a bike tour with three different levels or categories, with the beginners' bike tour ending in Glan.

Ologuin said another group of bikers will tour to Malapatan and the pro-level participants will go all the way up to Alabel, "the farthest area, where the beautiful beaches in Sarangani Bay can be found."

Simultaneously, there will be an opening of an exhibit to showcase the various products, programs and activities of Sarangani's various LGUs. The exhibit will run from March 1 to March 5 at the lobby of the City Hall in General Santos City.

To cap the event, on March 5, Ologuin said there will be a simultaneous coastal clean-up with all 68 coastal barangays within the SBPS taking part.

“We are very happy because we have the support of the LGUs in Sarangani. All LGUs and barangays are very cooperative,” she said.

*Image credits: [Penro Sarangani/SB PS2](#)*

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