

# Biodiversity office calls: Protect Tañon Strait

By **BusinessMirror**  
FEBRUARY 5, 2017

THE Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), through its Biodiversity Management Bureau (BMB), called for the protection of Tañon Strait against commercial fishers, and emphasized that overfishing could lead to ecosystem collapse.

“We believe that commercial fishing in an unsustainable manner is one of the major threats to our marine environment. Overfishing, as one of the many negative environmental consequences, is a primary cause of species extinction and ecosystem collapse,” DENR-BMB Director Mundita G. Lim said in a letter addressed to Oceana.

The bureau expressed concern over the proposed moratorium on commercial fishing ban in the Tañon Strait Protected Seascape, one of the largest marine protected areas in the Philippines.

Some local government officials in Cebu initiated the proposal, which, if approved, will allow commercial fishing within municipal waters, beginning at 10.1 kilometers from the coast.

Municipal waters include biologically important near-shore areas, where mangroves, seagrass and coral reefs thrive. Near-shore areas serve as the nesting and breeding ground for fish and other marine organisms. “As managers of the seascape, our positions and decisions will always consider sustainable management of the area, wherein the overall health of the vulnerable marine resources should not be jeopardized and the community benefits will be ensured,” Lim said.

Tañon Strait is a critical marine habitat and important migratory path for 14 of the 27 species of whales and dolphins in the Philippines. It boasts of at least 90 species of fish, 20 species of crustaceans, 26 species of mangroves and 18,830 hectares of coral reef.

The rare chambered nautilus, giant diamond-backed squid and critically endangered dugong can also be found in its waters. It is also a rich fishing ground for artisanal or municipal fishers who live along the coastal areas within the 42 cities and municipalities in the provinces of Cebu, Negros Oriental and Negros Occidental.

“Oceana is firm in its stand that commercial-fishing activity is prohibited in marine protected areas. It is clearly defined in the National Integrated Protected Area System [Nipas] Act, in the Amended Fisheries Code, and supported by the Tañon Strait General Management Plan,” said lawyer Gloria Estenzo Ramos, vice president for Oceana Philippines.

Ramos said commercial fishers continue to enter and illegally fish in municipal waters in a lop-sided competition with the municipal fisherfolk for the declining fish stock—marginalizing them further, the fisherfolk being among the poorest of the poor in the Philippines.

“Allowing the commercial fishing activity is not only unlawful, it also violates and is, in fact, an abdication of the mandates of the various agencies, including local government units [LGUs], of the shared responsibility to maintain a healthful and balanced ecology, protect our marine wealth and ensure that the livelihood of our suffering small fisherfolk will not be impaired further,” Ramos added.

The DENR-BMB also echoed the need to give preferential access to municipal fisherfolk, who are allowed to use passive or nondestructive fishing gears—such

as hook and lines, fish traps and crab pots—within municipal waters and consider Tañon Strait their fishing areas for decades.

“The marginalized fishermen should be given preferential access to their traditional fishing grounds and should not be limited by the technological capacities of the commercial fishers,” Lim said.

She also said the DENR-BMB, through the Protected Area Office (PAO) of Tañon Strait, would closely coordinate with LGUs to address the issue on commercial fishing.

The PAO of Tañon Strait, along with LGUs, fisheries bureau and other national enforcement agencies, are collaborating in the seaborne patrol operations and apprehension of commercial fishers as part of the strengthened enforcement measures to deter illegal and destructive fishing within the protected seascape.

The Department of Agriculture (DA), likewise, is strengthening the fight against illegal fishing. Agriculture Secretary Emmanuel F. Piñol committed to recommend to President Duterte the suspension of local government officials who fail to stop illegal fishing in their areas within six months.

Duterte will award the country’s outstanding coastal communities, which search the DA launched last year. It includes a successful campaign against illegal fishing among the criteria.

(Article retrieved from: <http://www.businessmirror.com.ph/biodiversity-office-calls-protect-tanon-strait/>)