

Opening of the Marine Protected Area in Limasawa, Southern Leyte, Philippines - 17th of November 2008 -

Limasawa is an island situated at the South of Sogod Bay in Southern Leyte, the Philippines. This isolated outcrop covering only six square kilometres has lush vegetation and is home to approximately six thousand farmers and fishermen. It was on this island that Magellan was said to have conducted the first Catholic Mass in the Philippines.

Not long ago, on the 17th of November 2008, Limasawa celebrated the opening of its Marine Protected Area (MPA). Thanks to the enthusiasm and determination of the new Mayor Melchor P. Petracorta and his competent Municipal officers, the process of creating an MPA in Municipality Limasawa has finally been completed after many years of preparation.

A warm welcome speech by the Mayor of
Limasawa Sir Melchor P. Petracorta



A Marine Protected Area is a designated area where coral reefs, and often the shoreline too, are protected. A no-anchoring, no-fishing and no-collecting policy allows the corals and fish populations to recover and regain natural health status. Not only do the coral and fish grow in size, but also the number of species increases. Larval and fish dispersal to the surrounding areas allow these populations to slowly recover too. With a well-managed MPA, a spill-over effect is noticeable in the area surrounding the MPA after approximately 2 to 3 years. Local fishermen benefit through a lower fish catch effort: in the same amount of time they are able to catch more and larger fish.

The MPA of Limasawa is situated in the Northeast of the island along the Barangays San Agustin and Lugsongan, and is one of the largest of the 45 Marine Protected Areas in Southern Leyte. It protects the beautiful drop off and has many wonderful dive sites where one can discover and enjoy the wonders of the Limasawa drop off. Some of the most well-known dive sites are Adrian's Cove, Gunter's Wall and Zac's Cove where one can spot lovely nudibranchs and numerous large fish such as snapper, tuna and Sweetlips. The many black coral bushes and small caves through which the sunlight pears, form amazing landscapes. Occasional hammerhead and dolphin sightings provide unique experiences to divers.

The grand opening was celebrated on a beach inside the MPA and turned into a real festivity with a delicious lunch, a ribbon at the water level, a big banner and many colorful balloons. The Mayor Mr Petracorta gave a warm welcome speech and initiated the cutting of the ribbon. Dr Scholz the program advisor of the German Technical Cooperation (GTZ) and the Annelies Ghesquiere the project scientist of Coral Cay Conservation (CCC) were invited to cut the ribbon.



Cutting of the ribbon by U. Scholz of GTZ and A. Ghesquiere of CCC



A short inspirational message by A. Ghesquiere, the project scientist of CCC

Inspirational messages were given by the Barangay Captains of San Agustin and Lugsongan, Mr Tabinas of the Provincial Environmental and Natural Resource Management Office (PENRMO), Mr Albaladejo Regional Director of the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR), Dr Scholz of GTZ, Prof Zeny of the Visayan State University (VSU), Mr Garvez of the Provincial Tourism Department and Miss Ghesquiere of CCC. After the closing remarks of Mr Olojan the Vice Mayor of Limasawa, an incredible lunch was offered for the festivity, including lechon.

During the opening celebration the last of the marker buoys were installed. With the many flagged marker buoys along the MPA and large billboards on the Northern and Southern boundaries, the MPA is clearly indicated. These good preparations and enthusiasm of the Mayor are positive signs of a good management. At the beginning of October CCC, the Secretary to the Sangguniang Bayan Ma'am Remigilda M. Salomon and the Municipal Agriculturist Ma'am Vilma M. Montemayor provided lectures on coral biology, threats to corals and MPAs.

With good management, support of the local fishermen and education of the children, the MPA of Limasawa is sure to become a great success. The corals and fish population will have the opportunity to regain health, grow and disperse. A spill-over effect of the MPA will hopefully be visible within the next few years, benefiting the Limasawa inhabitants.

Text and photos by Annelies Ghesquiere

Coral Cay Conservation

A not-for-profit organisation that is invited by the Provincial Government of Southern Leyte to collect detailed information about the coral reefs in Sogod Bay and to provide resources to help sustain livelihoods and alleviate poverty through the protection, restoration and management of coral reefs and tropical forests

"This is an important step towards the protection of coral reefs and the fish populations, which will benefit the local Philippine people in the long term. Knowing a large and beautiful MPA was created with the hard work and support of many different people, makes this opening celebration a very special moment"

Annelies Ghesquiere, Project Scientist of Coral Cay Conservation