

**Ethical Volunteering Policy
of Marine Conservation Philippines (MCP)**
Version 2.0



Adopted	October 2026
Supersedes	Version 1.0, March 2026
Next scheduled review	October 2027, or earlier if warranted.
Policy owner	Jason Matthews, General Manager
Approved by	Magnus Nielsen, Director, and Søren Knudsen, Founder, on behalf of the MCP Executive Board

1. Introduction

Volunteering is only ethical when the work is genuinely needed, done properly, and does no harm along the way.

Marine Conservation Philippines (MCP) is a non-stock, non-profit organisation registered as Marine Habitat Preservation of the Philippines Inc. At MCP, volunteers join long-term reef monitoring, Marine Protected Area management and community work that we carry out with DENR, ENRD and the local governments of southern Negros Oriental. Our survey data is open-access and guides how those governments manage their protected areas.

This policy sets out the commitments behind that work. We review it annually.

2. What We Won't Do

Some of the most popular volunteer activities in the world do little good, and some do real harm. These are our red lines. We will not:

- Ask volunteers to do work they aren't trained for, or to dive without proper safety procedures in place.
- Let a volunteer take the place of a paid local worker.
- Run staged or exploitative experiences, or projects that exist mainly for social media.
- Take part in activities that could harm reefs or communities, however popular they are. Our [stance on coral farming](#) is one example.

3. Our Eight Principles

Principle 1: Community-Led and Locally Relevant

Our work is planned with the government agencies and communities we serve, and it follows needs identified locally, not volunteer preferences. We support long-term conservation goals rather than short-term outputs, and we put building skills within the Philippines first.

In practice: We hold a permanent seat on the Protected Area Management Board for Apo Island, and we are the technical support partner to two municipal alliances in Negros Oriental. We work in fourteen municipalities altogether. We have trained more than 120 government divers, free of charge. We offer fully funded [scholarships](#) to local participants. See our [partners](#).

Principle 2: Do No Harm

Every activity is planned to avoid ecological, social and cultural harm. Volunteers only take on roles they have been trained for, and we avoid anything that creates dependency on us or undermines local systems.

In practice: We regularly turn down activities that are popular with volunteers but do little for the reef, or worse. Our [stance on coral farming](#) explains one such decision in full. We also share what we've learned openly, in online volunteering forums, on LinkedIn and in the Green Fins forums.

Principle 3: No Displacement of Local Jobs

Volunteers must never replace paid local workers. Our kitchen, grounds, maintenance, transport, security, school teaching and ocean plastics collection roles are all held by Filipino staff, and we hire, train and promote Filipino colleagues across the organisation.

Volunteers do carry out our reef surveys, and that is deliberate. No local budget exists to pay for monitoring on this scale, so without volunteers it wouldn't happen at all, and volunteer fees pay the salaries of our local team. Divemaster trainees take on some logistical duties as part of their training, always under professional supervision.

In practice: MCP currently employs 35 Filipino staff. Our [scholarship programme](#), launched in 2025, trains Filipino scholars from Open Water to Divemaster with all fees and expenses paid by MCP, and many of our staff started as interns with us. See [careers at MCP](#).

Principle 4: Skilled, Structured Contributions

Volunteers and interns work in structured, supervised roles: [marine biodiversity monitoring](#), [scientific data collection and analysis](#), [community education and outreach](#), and [capacity building with local partners](#). We train everyone properly first, so their work can be relied on.

In practice: Our teams carry out 2,000+ reef surveys a year, and the data is open to all on our [data portal](#). Volunteer stays start at six weeks (the average is around ten weeks), because scientifically sound survey work takes training.

Principle 5: Environmental Integrity

Conservation outcomes come before the volunteer experience. All diving and fieldwork follows ecological best practice, and we work to keep our own footprint small.

In practice: All our diving follows the [Green Fins](#) Code of Conduct, and the only time we touch anything underwater is to remove litter during clean-ups. We have planted more than 31,000 [mangroves](#) and collected more than 427 tonnes of marine litter. On base, we recycle about half of our waste by weight, and food scraps never become waste: they feed our chickens and pigs. Our [food policy](#) keeps our kitchen's environmental impact low. Volunteering with us isn't carbon neutral, as we don't yet plant enough trees for that, but we work hard to keep its footprint light.

Principle 6: Child Protection

We follow our [Child Protection Policy](#), which is based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Whenever we run activities with children, volunteers work alongside MCP staff and are never left alone with them, and every activity is planned with a clear purpose.

In practice: Lessons in local schools are taught by Filipino teachers we employ, which gives children consistent, professional teaching rather than a changing cast of visitors. All our staff sign the Child Protection Policy, and we follow its rules on photographing children and sharing their images.

Principle 7: Responsible Volunteer Management

Volunteers should know what they are signing up for, and be well supported once they arrive. We set out clear [expectations](#) and role descriptions before departure, and provide supervision, mentoring and chances to learn throughout every stay. Our volunteer coordinator lives on site and is prepared to handle any issue before it becomes a genuine concern.

In practice: New volunteers start every other Monday. In addition to dive training, the first week includes briefings on health and safety, local culture and customs, and how life on base works, along with paperwork, certification checks and fitting the personal dive kit volunteers use throughout their stay. During their stay, volunteers attend talks on the science behind our work and its conservation impact.

Principle 8: Transparency and Accountability

Good intentions are not enough, so we make our work easy to check. We publish our results, our finances and our data, speak openly about what works and what doesn't, and keep improving based on feedback.

In practice: Our results for every year since 2015 are on our [achievements](#) page, and our [expenditures](#) page shows where our income goes, volunteer fees included. Every volunteer is encouraged to give feedback in an end-of-stay debrief, and is asked to do so anonymously after they leave. This gives us continuous feedback, which we use to improve our programme. Over the years, that feedback has led to many small changes which, together, have shaped how we work, how we assign staff and even who we hire.

4. Related Policies and Documents

Child Protection Policy. How we keep children safe in every part of our work.

marineconservationphilippines.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/08/mcp_child_protection_policy_v2_feb2026.pdf

What to Expect at MCP. What we ask of new arrivals, from the first week to life on base.

marineconservationphilippines.org/expectations/

Expenditures. Where our income goes, and what it pays for.

marineconservationphilippines.org/expenditures/

Achievements. Our results, year by year since 2015.

marineconservationphilippines.org/achievements/

Data Portal. Our reef survey data, open to everyone.

marineconservationphilippines.org/data-portal/

Our Partners. The agencies, local governments and organisations we work with.

marineconservationphilippines.org/partners/

5. Questions About This Policy

Questions about this policy can be sent to team@mcp.email.