



The Apo Island story

Background reading for teachers

This reading gives you the background for each slide, with sources you can check.

History

By the late 1970s, Apo's fishers were seeing falling catches, and destructive methods such as muro-ami and dynamite fishing were in use. In 1979 Silliman University proposed a sanctuary.² After discussion with social workers and biologists, the community chose a 0.45 km stretch of the southwestern reef as a no-take sanctuary in 1982. It was legalised by municipal ordinance in the mid-1980s (sources give 1985 and 1986) and run by an elected Marine Management Committee.^{1, 2} In August 1994 the island was declared a Protected Landscape and Seascape by Presidential Proclamation No. 438 under the NIPAS law, and management passed to the Protected Area Management Board, which introduced fixed visitor fees.^{1, 3} Dr Angel Alcala, the National Scientist who led the Silliman work, helped establish Apo as the Philippines' second community-managed marine reserve after Sumilon Island. The 42nd annual coral and fish survey took place in 2024.³

The results

Long-term monitoring found that the biomass of surgeonfish and jacks, the main fishery targets, tripled inside the no-take reserve over 18 years, while a fished site showed no significant change. Catch rates were higher close to the reserve, but fishing effort there was often lower, and the estimated contribution of spillover to total yield was probably well under 10%.⁴

NEOLI

A global study of 87 MPAs found conservation benefits increased exponentially with five features: no take, well enforced, old (over 10 years), large (over 100 km²) and isolated by deep water or sand. Effective MPAs with four or five features had twice as many large fish species per transect, five times more large-fish biomass and fourteen times more shark biomass than fished areas. 59% of the MPAs studied had only one or two features and were not ecologically distinguishable from fished sites.⁵

MCP and Apo

MCP holds a seat on the Apo Island Protected Area Management Board and served on the advisory board for the Apo jetty project in 2023.⁶

Sources

1. Raymundo, L.J. and White, A.T. (2004). 50 years of scientific contributions of Dr Angel Alcala: Apo Island management. Silliman Journal 45(2).
2. Philstar (2010). Apo Island reef: paradise lost, regained, shared. philstar.com
3. Silliman University (2024). National Scientist Alcala's MPA marker unveiled in Apo Island. su.edu.ph
4. Russ, G.R. and others (2004). Marine reserve benefits local fisheries. Ecological Applications 14(2): 597-606.
5. Edgar, G.J. and others (2014). Global conservation outcomes depend on marine protected areas with five key features. Nature 506: 216-220.
6. Marine Conservation Philippines. Apo Island. marineconservationphilippines.org

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