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Government takes tougher stance vs environmental offenders in Tañon Strait

The Protected Area Office is set to operationalize the enforcement plan for the Tañon Strait Protected Seascape, which seeks to increase seaborne patrol operations and file cases against violators.

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 is a rich fishing ground supplying the fish protein needs of the 42 cities and municipalities in Cebu and Negros Islands.

“Tañon Strait is a marine biodiversity hotspot. Effective management mechanisms are necessary, along with strong law enforcement, to ensure that it is protected. The operationalization of the enforcement plan should deter the banned commercial fishing and destructive activities in the protected area,” said lawyer Gloria Estenzo Ramos, Vice President for Oceana Philippines.

The enforcement plan serves as the guide in harmonizing the functions of government agencies tasked to protect Tañon Strait. It is seen as a potent method to strengthen enforcement measures in the protected seascape, and includes a step-by-step enforcement strategy for operations, surveillance, and filing of cases against violators.

This is one of the components of Tañon Strait’s General Management Plan (GMP), which provides mechanisms for protecting marine habitats, ensuring sustainable fisheries, and reducing illegal fishing through increased patrolling and apprehension, prosecution of violators, and training of law enforcers.

“Regular patrols and surveillance activities are necessary for the detection and intelligence gathering of violations within the protected area,” said Am Prospero Lendio, the protected area superintendent in Tañon Strait.

The TSPS Protected Area Office said that it will also conduct regular inspection of fishing vessels along Tañon Strait, and pursue legal action against violators.

Oceana, in partnership with various government agencies such as the Biodiversity Management Bureau of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources, and the Department of Justice, assisted in providing legal trainings to law enforcement personnel, including the newly designated special prosecutors for protected areas.

Oceana is also working with the fisheries bureau in pilot-testing vessel monitoring technologies to track fishing activities in Tañon Strait.

Despite being declared a protected area in 1998, Tañon Strait still suffers from exploitation by commercial fishers encroaching in municipal waters, degradation of critical habitats, and over harvesting of fishery resources.

“Protecting Tañon Strait is a challenging, yet vital, task. The strengthened collaboration of various stakeholders to conserve and protect this critically important marine habitat and fishing ground, where thousands of fishers depend on for food and livelihood, has to be prioritized to ensure sustainable seafood security for future generations,” Ramos said.

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