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## First Maritime and Archipelagic Nation Awareness (MANA) Month Kicks Off in Malacañang

To “raise the level of awareness on our marine wealth and endowments as well as the challenges and opportunities in harnessing the same as a critical first step,” Malacañang kicked off the country’s first-ever celebration of the Maritime and Archipelagic Nation Awareness (MANA) Month last 4 September in Malacañang Palace.

“The word *Mana* is of Austronesian origin, which means power, effectiveness and authority. On the other hand, *Mana* in Tagalog means heritage. Our seas are our *Mana* of which we are heavenly blessed to possess,” says Executive Secretary and National Coast Watch Council Chairperson Salvador Medialdea. He also emphasized the importance of partnerships among marine and maritime stakeholders to advocate for the awareness of our distinctly sea-based heritage.

Led by the National Coast Watch Council (NCWC) through its Secretariat led by Executive Director and Undersecretary Jose Luis Alano, plus global marine conservation organization Oceana, the event features a week-long photo exhibit featuring the Philippine Rise, bolstered by talks and film screenings.

Twenty images featuring a dazzling array of reef fish, colorful corals, algae and other marine life are now on display at the Mabini Hall of Malacañang Palace. The images were taken during the May 2016 expedition to Benham Bank, the shallowest portion of the Philippine Rise, a 24.4-million hectare undersea territory of the Philippines. It includes a 13-million hectare extended continental shelf (ECS), which was declared a part of the country’s territory in 2012.

The 2016 expedition was led by government scientists from the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) and University of the Philippines, technical divers from the Philippine Coast Guard and Philippine Navy, plus underwater videographers from Oceana. Marine scientists found a dazzling array of marine life, including areas with over 100% coral cover and even seaweed growing at improbable depths.

In December 2016, 196 State parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity adopted the Philippine Rise as an ecologically and biologically significant marine area and one of the only known spawning sites of the commercially-valuable Pacific Bluefin Tuna.

“We laud this significant celebration to raise the consciousness of every Filipino on the importance of protecting and preserving our oceans. We are Earth’s second-largest archipelago and many Filipinos depend on the sea for food and livelihood. We all have a responsibility to protect our natural heritage such as the Philippine Rise, including the pristine Benham Bank,” concludes Oceana Philippines Vice-president Atty. Gloria Estenzo-Ramos. (30)

## Captioned Images:



Led by National Coast Watch Council Chair Salvador Medialdea, NCWC Executive Director Jose Luis Alano, Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana and Oceana Philippines Vice-president Gloria Estenzo-Ramos, the Maritime and Archipelagic Nation Awareness (MANA) Month was kicked off last 4 September in Malacañang Palace. (OCEANA / Ryan Miller Romitman)



MANA MO is being spearheaded by the National Coast Watch Council (NCWC), Oceana, plus allied agencies and nonprofits. (OCEANA / Ryan Miller Romitman)



MANA month is spearheaded by the National Coast Watch Council (NCWC) and Oceana Philippines. The weeklong kickoff includes an exhibit on the Philippine Rise, plus film screenings on marine and archipelagic issues. (OCEANA / Ryan Miller Romitman)

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