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OCEANA OPPOSES MINING IN SAMAR & BENHAM BANK

Oceana Philippines stands as one with the champions of **Manicani Island** off Guian in Eastern Samar in opposing the renewal of the mineral production sharing agreement within the island ecosystem. Manicani Island is part of the Guian Marine Reserve and is classified as a Protected Landscape and Seascape pursuant to Proclamation No. 469 issued by former President Fidel Ramos in 1994. Mining is incongruous in a marine reserve, as the primary purpose of a marine reserve's establishment is "to protect and conserve the ecological, biological, scenic, scientific and educational features of the area."

The Proclamation expressly prohibits "the destruction of terrestrial and marine ecosystems including mangroves, coral reefs and seagrass beds or any other activity, which could disturb or destroy these ecosystems and / or the resources therein." Public officials may be held accountable for allowing the destruction of these fragile and protected ecosystems.

Oceana likewise opposes mineral exploration in pristine areas like **Benham Bank**, the shallowest part of the Philippine Rise. As a marine conservation organization, Oceana believes in the sustainable and science-based management of our marine wealth to maintain vibrant, healthy and productive seas.

Mineral and fuel surveys may possibly use seismic blasts of compressed air to penetrate miles into the seabed to search for offshore mineral deposits. This kills free-floating organisms like zooplankton – the basis for higher oceanic life, fed upon by fish and corals alike. Seismic blasts also hamper navigation and communication for cetaceans like whales and dolphins – legally-protected animals which pass through the Philippine Rise.

The government is reportedly planning to allocate PHP100 million for the exploration and survey mapping of the Philippine Rise – with garnered information to serve as a point of reference for the development of the area.

It is urgent for the government to exercise prudence and at the very least, adopt a management framework and spare the pristine Benham Bank from any impact.

Oceana instead supports the plan of the Biodiversity Management Bureau (BMB) for biodiversity research in the Philippine Rise. It recommends continued monitoring to identify the significance and connectivity between Benham Bank and other seamounts and shallow-water reefs – as a safety net in case shallow-water reefs are heavily-damaged by climate change.

Ecological thresholds must be determined to understand the impacts of any activity to be conducted. This will enable decision-makers to determine which activities should be permitted and which should be barred.

The uniqueness and importance of Benham Bank as the only known area in the Philippines with portions still fully-covered by coral, while being a known spawning area for commercially-important Pacific Bluefin Tuna, has already been recognized by 196 countries by adopting the Philippine Rise as an Ecologically and Biologically Significant Marine Area (EBSA) and must be legally protected by the Philippine government.

Oceana, along with other non-government organizations, will continue its vigilance against irreversible and destructive mining on behalf of the Filipino people. We call on our government to prioritize food security, build the resilience of our natural life support systems to the impacts of climate change and adhere to a truly sustainable development framework instead of rushing headlong into ecologically-destructive mining. Together, we can ensure that our last frontiers do not become our lost frontiers. Log on to ph.oceana.org to know more. (30)

Oceana is the largest international advocacy organization dedicated solely to ocean conservation. Oceana is rebuilding abundant and biodiverse oceans by winning science-based policies in countries that control one third of the world's wild fish catch. With over 100 victories that stop overfishing, habitat destruction, pollution and killing of threatened species like turtles and sharks, Oceana's campaigns are delivering results. A restored ocean means that one billion people can enjoy a healthy seafood meal, every day, forever. Together, we can save the oceans and help feed the world. Visit ph.oceana.org to learn more.

Captioned Images:



Benham Bank, the shallowest portion of the Philippine Rise, hosts areas with 100% coral cover. It is also one of the few known spawning areas for Pacific Bluefin Tuna. **Oceana recommends further studies** to understand the Philippine Rise before extractive activities like mining are conducted. ([Oceana](http://Oceana.org) / [UPLB](http://UPLB.org))

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