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President Duterte Declares September as Maritime and Archipelagic Nation Awareness Month

To raise awareness on issues related to national maritime and archipelagic concerns, President Rodrigo Duterte recently signed a Presidential Proclamation declaring September as the Maritime and Archipelagic Nation Awareness Month (MANA MO).

“The Constitution demands the protection of the nation’s marine wealth in its archipelagic waters, territorial sea, and exclusive economic zone, and reserve its use and enjoyment exclusively to Filipino citizens,” says the Presidential Proclamation.

As part of the month-long MANA MO celebration, the House of Representatives and Oceana are staging a weeklong exhibit to highlight the wonders of Benham Bank, the shallowest portion of the Philippine Rise, a 24.4-million hectare undersea territory which hosts some of the most pristine coral reefs in the country. The exhibit will run from 25 to 29 September at the Congress.

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. Oceana advocates for the protection of the area, starting with a declaration of Benham Bank as a no-take zone.

“As Earth’s second-largest archipelago, we are heartened to have the support of our congressional representatives and national and local champions to conserve our oceans and coasts,” explains Oceana Philippines Marine Scientist Marianne Pan-Saniano

The National Coast Watch Council Secretariat, Oceana and civil society organizations launched MANA MO in Malacañang last 4 September through an interactive exhibit on the Philippine Rise, talks, plus film screenings on various ocean issues. It was graced by the presence of NCWC Chair, Executive Secretary Salvador Medialdea, Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana, NCWC Executive Director Undersecretary Jose Luis Alano, plus Oceana Philippines Vice-president Gloria Estenzo-Ramos

A shore cleanup was held in Zambales on 16 September organized by the International Coastal Cleanup Zambales, Lighthouse Marina Resort Legacy Foundation and allied groups, with an environmental summit slated from 28 to 29 September in Subic Bay.

Oceana, Greenpeace, Green Research, Haribon, Roots Asia and other key allies are now pushing for the passage of the Expanded National Integrated Protected Area (ENIPAS) Act, which will confer a greater degree of protection for 92 new protected areas in the country, while enhancing protection for existing parks.

“MANA MO is a call for everyone – from our lawmakers to coastal residents – to join hands and protect our natural heritage as citizens of an archipelagic and bio-diversity rich nation. As one, we should protect iconic places like Benham Bank and ensure that we will leave a living legacy for our children,” says Oceana Philippines Vice-president Atty. Gloria Estenzo Ramos. (30)

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Captioned Images:



Led by Catanduanes Representative (5th from left) Cesar Sarmiento, Biodiversity Management Bureau Director Mundita Lim (3rd from right) and Oceana Vice President Atty. Gloria Estenzo Ramos (4th from left) with other members of the House of Representatives, the Benham Bank photo exhibit was opened in Congress to celebrate the Maritime and Archipelagic Nation Awareness (MANA) Month in September. (OCEANA / Ryan Miller Romitman)



The Philippine Rise exhibit highlights the beauty and bounty of the Benham Bank, the shallowest portion of the Rise which is possibly the only place left in the Philippines with 100% coral cover. (OCEANA / Ryan Miller Romitman)



An Oriental wrasse (*Oxycheilinus rhodochrous*) rests on a coral head. Oceana’s interactive exhibit features the beauty and bounty of the Philippine Rise. (OCEANA / UPLB)