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Management board adopts vessel monitoring in Tañon Strait

The Tañon Strait Protected Area Management Board (PAMB) executive committee approved the resolution to require the installation of vessel monitoring for all commercial fishing vessels within the protected seascape.

“We laud the move to require vessel monitoring for all commercial fishing vessels along Tañon Strait. It is an effective tool to deter and stop illegal fishing, and its implementation is a momentous step in protecting our diverse, yet fragile municipal waters and protected areas,” said lawyer Gloria Estenzo Ramos, Vice-President for Oceana Philippines.

In a resolution approved as a policy last January 31, the executive committee of the Tañon Strait Protected Seascape (TSPSP) required the installation of vessel monitoring technology for all commercial fishing vessels which dock and transit within the protected seascape.

“Due to the large size of the protected area, there is a need for mechanisms such as Vessel Monitoring to ensure that the management plan and enforcement plan are effectively carried out and restore ecological integrity in Tañon Strait,” the resolution said.

Vessel monitoring mechanism is a means, method or system used to track and monitor the position, course and speed of the vessels at any given time for the purpose of management of fishing effort and fisheries resources and for traceability.

The resolution emphasized that this action will strengthen enforcement measures against illegal commercial fishing, in line with the [government's all-out drive](#) to stop illegal fishing in the country.

“The Fisheries Code, as amended, requires vessel monitoring measures for all commercial fishing vessels to monitor their fishing behavior and ensure sustainable fisheries management,” the resolution said.

Tañon Strait is the first protected seascape to require vessel monitoring for all commercial fishing vessels transiting the area. It is a critical marine habitat and important migratory path for 14 of the 27 species of whales and dolphins in the Philippines. The protected seascape has at least 90 species of fish, 20 species of crustaceans, 26 species of mangroves, and 18,830 hectares of coral reef.

It is also a rich fishing ground for artisanal or municipal fishers who live along the coastal areas within the 42 cities and municipalities in the provinces of Cebu, Negros Oriental, and Negros Occidental.

The Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) has been testing vessel monitoring technologies nationwide, with Oceana facilitating the pilot-testing within Tañon Strait.

Dr. Al Orolfo, the regional environment director for Negros Island Region, strongly supports the action and declared that, “We envision Tañon Strait to showcase the harmonious relationship between man and nature within a marine ecosystem. The National Integrated Protected Area System law is explicit on this, thus any economic activities must cover the essential elements of sustainable development. The adoption by the PAMB on the policy regarding the use of vessel monitoring in our Tañon Strait is a laudable move. It integrates the use of tool, technology, and law enforcement strategy that addresses the threats posed by commercial fishing to the livelihood of marginalized fisherfolks, and to the rich marine biodiversity in the area.”

Oceana, the largest international organization focused solely on marine conservation, echoed the importance of vessel monitoring in the country’s fishing areas such as Tañon Strait, which supports the livelihood of thousands of municipal fisherfolks and their families.

“Vessel monitoring will contribute to the elimination of unfair competition brought about by commercial fishing operators illegally encroaching municipal waters,” Ramos said.

Various government agencies, such as the [Biodiversity and Management Bureau \(BMB\)](#) called out the continuous encroachment of commercial fishers, and said that preferential access should be given to municipal fisherfolks who use passive or non-destructive fishing gears such as hook and lines, fish traps, and crab pots

Despite its status as a protected seascape, an approved general management plan and the conduct of joint seaborne operations by government enforcement agencies, Tañon Strait still faces threats such as overfishing, illegal intrusion of commercial fishers in municipal waters, and ocean pollution from industries and households.

Last year, an [oil spill](#) hit the town of Moalboal in Cebu, a popular dive spot and tourist destination in Tañon Strait which is known for its rich coral reef, and diverse marine species such as the sea turtles. However, authorities were not able to identify the perpetrators, since there were no systems in place to monitor passing vessels.

“Protecting Tañon Strait is a very important task. We must work together to conserve and protect this critically important marine habitat and fishing ground. Joint policy endeavors such as this must be sustained and fully implemented, to restore fisheries abundance, and ensure the protection and conservation of our fisheries and natural resources, and long-term seafood security,” Ramos said.

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