

3/10/2017

## Oceana pushes for management framework to protect Benham Rise

**The Department of National Defense (DND) reported that foreign vessels were spotted within the Benham Rise Region. Oceana urges government agencies to expedite the adoption of the management framework in Benham Rise to protect and sustainably manage the undersea region.**

“We urge the government to expedite the formulation of the management framework for Benham Rise to protect and sustainably manage it. Benham Rise is an important marine resource for the Filipinos, and holds tremendous potential for discovering more unique species and outstanding samples of marine resources. We need to prioritize its protection, including the pristine Benham Bank as a no-take zone,” said lawyer Gloria Estenzo Ramos, Vice-President for Oceana Philippines.

Oceana was part of the expedition team led by government scientists which explored the area in May last year, revealing vast and pristine coral reef ecosystem in Benham Bank, the shallowest portion of the area. Scientists observed one hundred percent coral cover in the surveyed area, with a wide variety of colorful branching and plate corals. The expedition team also documented a vast mesophotic reef ecosystem – coral reefs found at depths of up to 150 meters (492 feet). Scientists believe such deep sea reefs can serve as a potential source and refuge for shallow reef fishes and other marine organisms that could be affected by climate change.

Benham Rise is an undersea region located east of Luzon. It includes an outer section recognized by the United Nations’ Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (UNCLOS) as the Philippines’ newest territory in 2012, which expanded the region from 11.4 million hectares to 24.4 million hectares, an area about the same size as Luzon.

“Our government should not hesitate to exercise its sovereign right and responsibility in exploring, conserving and managing the natural resources of the region to ensure that we wield effective exercise of our jurisdiction in Benham Rise. The management framework would be a much needed road map to effectively manage and protect our precious natural heritage,” Ramos said.

The management plan is envisioned to also include an enforcement plan for biodiversity conservation, fisheries, and commercial and economic activities in the area, to ensure that violators such as poachers or illegal commercial fishers will be properly apprehended and prosecuted.

Recently, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources- Biodiversity and Management Bureau (DENR-BMB) held a series of consultations and workshops involving various government agencies and stakeholders for the development of a management framework for the protection of Benham Rise. The

Senate has likewise held a public hearing on the creation of the Benham Rise Development Authority, to identify sustainable, scientific and technological approaches for the development of Benham Rise.

Oceana is working with government agencies to push for a scientifically-sound management framework, which would prioritize the biodiversity and conservation aspects of the Benham Rise Region, especially the Benham Bank, which is the shallowest portion of the Rise. Oceana pushes for the protection of Benham Bank because of the iconic area's tremendous biological resources that requires immediate protection.

"We all recognize the significance of Benham Rise for food security, climate change adaptation, and for the sustenance of the Filipinos, now and in the future. We need to act fast in protecting it from external threats such as territorial encroachments, overfishing and other exploitative activities," Ramos said.

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*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 [www.oceana.org](http://www.oceana.org) to learn more.*