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## Protecting Fisheries Yields 30 Times Investment in the Tañon Strait

"We invested P2M in fisheries protection. Today, our fishers are catching at least P60M more seafood every season," shares Bindoy Mayor Valente Yap at the recently-concluded Ocean Heroes Assembly, which convened 20 coastal heroes recognized for protecting the waters of the Tañon Strait, a major fishing area which feeds millions of people in the Visayas.

"We eliminated blast fishing within five years. It took time, but our small steps eventually bore fruit," recalls Yap. "Fishers initially resisted conservation, but the proof of the pudding is in the eating. Now they actively protect Bindoy's municipal waters to continue reaping the benefits brought by healthier and more productive seas."

"Our fishers can earn over P500,000 just by growing seaweed, proving that there are many ways to produce seafood," adds Manjuyod Mayor Felix Sy. The heroes convened on 30 August in Cebu City to share ideas on how best to protect the waters of the Tañon Strait, an area where various NGOs including Oceana, Rare, Tambuyog and the Coastal Conservation & Education Foundation (CCEF) are working to conserve.

Launched in 2016, the Ocean Heroes Awards is a partnership between Oceana, Rare, the Tañon Strait Protected Area Office, Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources, plus the provincial governments of Cebu, Negros Occidental and Negros Oriental to honor courageous community leaders working to sustainably-manage marine ecosystems in the Tañon Strait.

The 2016 winners were Norlan Pagal, Oliver Dayupay, Veda Raunillo and Roberto Quigay, while Virgilio Aviso, Renato Buenviaje, Jocelyn Moya-Hekrdle and Mariano Sarcot comprised this year's awardees. "Most heroes are recognized when they die, but Oceana celebrates those who not just live – but actively fight to keep our oceans alive," says 2017 awardee Jocelyn Moya-Hekrdle.

Illegal and destructive fishing activities such as illegal commercial fishing, blast-fishing continue to destroy marine ecosystems in the Visayas, eroding the capacity of reefs to produce food. "Through strong collaborations, we aim to end illegal fishing within the park," promises Tañon Strait Park Superintendent Am Prospero Lendio.

The Tañon Strait is a 161-kilometer strip dividing the provinces of Cebu and Negros Island. The Strait is one of the largest and most productive Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) in the country, hosting 63% of the country's coral species and 14 types of whale and dolphin, while providing food and livelihood for 42 towns, cities and municipalities in Cebu, Negros Oriental and Negros Occidental.

“Our Ocean Heroes are the vanguards and voices, the protectors of Tañon Strait,” concludes Oceana Vice-president Atty. Gloria Estenzo-Ramos. “By ensuring that its reefs are spared from illegal commercial and small-scale fishing, we can maximize the chances of reefs recovering and fish returning.” (30)

### Captioned Images:



Participants and organizers of the Ocean Heroes 2017 assembly pledge to give the Tañon Strait some much-needed ‘time-off’ from illegal fishing. ([Oceana Philippines](#))



Ms. Jocelyn Moya-Hekrdle from Negros Occidental and Mr. Mariano Sarcol from Cebu are just two of the heroes recognized by Oceana for tirelessly protecting their home waters from illegal fishers. ([Oceana Philippines](#))

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