



Site: The site is primarily a reef habitat, with about 40% live hard coral cover, and an abundance of fish and other reef-associated organisms, including giant clams listed on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.

The area is known to have relatively high diversity of fish assemblages, with a total number of 200 fish species recorded during a survey conducted by a FISH Project in 2006. Reports of sightings of a marine crocodile in the MPA are merely anecdotal, but the area is known as a habitat of sharks, sea turtles and marine mammals.

The site (48.03 has) was put under protection because of its relatively good live hard coral cover, which was then under threat from illegal fishing activities happening in

the area. Also, the area is a major source of juvenile fish and coral recruits for much of Tawi-Tawi Bay -- efforts to strengthen habitat and resource conservation in the area will likely benefit the entire Bay and adjacent seas.

Due to its high productivity, the area used to be one of the most popular sites for collecting fish with "fish pens" or "corrals". While fishers enjoyed relatively good yields there, elsewhere in their town, fish catches were declining at a rate fast enough to alarm local officials and the fishing communities.

Project: Hoping to arrest the decline, the local government with the help of USAID (U.S. Agency for International Development) set up a marine sanctuary. Sanctuaries can

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help ensure more productive fisheries by entirely banning fishing in critical fish habitat. The site selected for the proposed sanctuary was in the same area where the fish pens were located, so the mayor asked the operators to move to another location. To encourage compliance with the new sanctuary regulations, the mayor offered the affected fish pen operators a monthly stipend of 1,000 pesos (about \$20), provided they helped to guard the sanctuary. Despite opposition from some relatives, Kah Nas, a local fisherman, accepted and became one of the first fishery wardens.

Benefits: higher income for local fishermen, higher species diversity

Initially, the fish catch in the new location was disappointing, and even Kah Nas began to doubt his decision to support the sanctuary. "My income dipped to 3,000 pesos (\$60). I got nervous. I thought, 'What if production doesn't go up? What will happen to my family?'" he asked.

Within a short time, however, the situation did improve. A year after the sanctuary was set up and the fish pens were moved, Kah Nas' earnings had risen to 12,000 pesos (\$250), as had the other operators' incomes, increasing their previous revenue by some 20%.

Today, "our [fish] corrals are yielding more because there are now so many fishes inside and outside the sanctuary," Kah Nas proudly said. "There are all kinds of fish here now. We also see dolphins and sea turtles, and we've even spotted a crocodile," he said.

Most of all, Kah Nas said, "now all my relatives support the sanctuary. I think they understand better. They say, 'Without the sanctuary, we won't have any fish left to eat.'"

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