

## 5. Fishing, Dive Tourism and Marine Protected Areas

One significant effort in regulating coastal areas of the Calamianes has been through the creation of a series of community-based marine protected areas (MPAs). These MPAs, established by a number of organisations and institutions over several years in particular diving sites, included a system of user fees. Fishers' responses to these MPAs were ambiguous. I argue that these responses can be best analysed with reference to the ideas and representations bound up in the discourse of the poor moral fisher. I demonstrate how the attitudes and behaviour of fishers went a great way to shaping the particular character of these MPAs.

Essentially, support for MPAs among fishers in the Calamianes was closely tied to the question of whether or not they would have any impact on their livelihoods. This varied within and between communities, but overall fishers favoured the development of MPAs that were strongly directed towards providing benefits to local communities. MPAs were understood here as interventions that should not impinge on the activities of poorer small-scale fishers; it was argued that such interventions should support those activities. Local government officials, overall, supported these claims of fishers, seeing in MPAs a chance to bolster their conservationist credentials as well as providing extra revenue to the municipal treasury. For those in the dive industry, strongly affected by the transfer of management to communities and the imposition of user fees, responses were extremely negative. They argued that the MPAs were not about conservation at all; this was just a sham hiding the real desire among local government officials and communities to make money out of the dive industry.

I begin this chapter by reviewing some background related to the history of fisheries and coastal management in the Philippines. After an introduction to the scientific bases of MPAs is an analysis of some of the literature focused on the management of MPAs and their links with dive tourism. The majority of the chapter examines how local fishers, tourism operators, and local government officials responded to the creation of MPAs in the Calamianes. I conclude with a discussion of relevant policy implications that my analysis holds for the nexus of MPAs, fishing and dive tourism.

# Background to Coastal Resource Management and the Development of Marine Protected Areas

## Fisheries and Coastal Resource Management in the Philippines

Coastal resource management, as detailed in the literature, has not existed for most of the history of the Philippines.<sup>1</sup> The story of fisheries in the Philippines is perhaps familiar to those with knowledge of fisheries in other parts of the world (see for example Roberts 2007). As Butcher (2004: 193) describes it, for a certain period 'catches increased enormously as fishers based in the Philippines extended capture into ever deeper and more distant waters by applying new techniques and new versions of old methods and by doing so at a rate faster than that at which fish populations were depleted and ecosystems disrupted'. Technologies changed from fish traps and corrals in the early part of the twentieth century, through to the use of bag-netting (*basnigan*), which grew in number in the post-war period, through to the prevalence by the 1970s of the trawler (particularly the otter trawl) and of purse seining vessels.

Since this period, scientists have become more aware of just how much damage has been done to the marine environment of the Philippines. In 2004, the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) produced a comprehensive assessment of the state of Philippine marine fisheries. Providing a snapshot of the problems and issues faced by the fisheries, it emphasised eight defining characteristics:

- depleted fishery resources;
- degraded coastal environment and critical fisheries habitats;
- low catches, incomes and dissipated resource rents;
- physical losses and/or reduced value of catches due to improper post-harvest practices and inefficient marketing;
- inequitable distribution of benefits from resource use;
- intersectoral and intrasectoral conflicts;
- poverty among small-scale fishers; and
- inadequate systems and structures to manage fisheries (BFAR 2004: 345).

As White and others point out (Courtney and White 2000; White et al. 2002), in more recent times two major forces have influenced the development of

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<sup>1</sup> Butcher (2004) and Spoehr (1980) have both provided detailed and comprehensive accounts of the history of fisheries and fishing technology in the Philippines.

coastal resource management in the Philippines. First was the implementation of various projects and programs dealing with coastal resource management, funded by a range of national and international governments, NGOs and as well as other organisations. Major projects such as the Central Visayas Regional Project, the National Integrated Protected Area Project, the Coastal Resource Management Project and the Fisheries Resource Management Project were all multi-sited attempts at establishing a range of coastal resource management measures, including MPAs, community-based coastal resource assessments, mangrove reforestation, mariculture, strengthening fisheries law enforcement, and organising fisheries associations (White et al. 2002).

The second major force was the devolution of authority over coastal resource management from national to municipal, city and provincial governments, as manifested in a range of legislation. Most important were the Local Government Code (LGC) of 1991 (*Republic Act 7160*), and the Fisheries Code of 1998 (*Republic Act 8550*). The LGC was a wide-ranging reform that decentralised a range of government functions and powers to the municipal, city and provincial levels. In the coastal resource management sector, the LGC defined municipal waters as extending 15 km offshore, and gave municipal and city governments (local government units, or LGUs) authority over and a mandate to manage these waters. Based on this provision, the operation of commercial fishing vessels (defined as over three gross tons) became illegal within these municipal waters without a permit. The Fisheries Code of 1998 strengthened these provisions, specified the roles of LGUs with regard to management, and provided more detail on various prohibited acts and penalties (ELAC 2004).

Integrated Coastal Management or ICM<sup>2</sup> has emerged partly from the international debates and trends prevalent in the conservation movement during the 1980s. The focus on decentralised management and increased participation were a part of the broad trend towards community-based natural resource management and integrated conservation and development projects that occurred throughout the world (McShane and Wells 2004; Brosius et al. 2005). More recently, ICM has aimed to incorporate aspects of the move towards ecosystem-based management as well, and the FISH project, which has one site in the Calamianes, has been cited as the first example of ecosystem-based management in the tropics (Christie et al. 2007).

The goals of all such ICM projects are wide-ranging, according to White et al. (2005). They aim to: improve biophysical conditions; increase the level of stakeholder participation in the decision-making process; contribute

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<sup>2</sup> Many of the coastal resource management projects in the Philippines use a variety of terms to characterise their approach, including co-management, community-based management and more recently ecosystem-based management. I use the term integrated coastal management (ICM) here, as this is the most general term that encompasses a wide variety of more specific approaches.

to economic returns and livelihoods; strengthen legal and policy frameworks; strengthen the capacity for law enforcement; and build durable institutions beyond leadership changes. Christie et al. (2005: 471) state that 'ICM represents an appropriate middle ground between those advocating mainly for social and economic justice and those advocating mainly for environmental preservation'.

Christie argues that ICM is characterised by two key features: balancing conservation and development and ensuring multi-sectoral planning, and increasing levels of participation among various levels of government and other stakeholders (Christie 2005a: 209). The tools adopted in ICM projects include various measures such as those mentioned earlier; however, MPAs in particular tend to form a significant component of any ICM regime (White et al. 2005: 274). In 1974, the first MPA was established in Sumilon Island in Cebu, by researchers from nearby Siliman University in Dumaguete. Sumilon, and nearby Apo Island in Negros Oriental were well managed and well documented, and Apo Island in particular has served as a 'model' for demonstrating the validity and effectiveness of MPAs throughout the world (Alcala and Russ 2006). Since the establishment of these MPAs, '[a]s of 2008 at least 985 MPAs had been established in the Philippines', and 'they covered approximately 14,943 km<sup>2</sup>' (Weeks et al. 2010: 533).

## The Scientific Bases of Marine Protected Areas

The general scientific purpose of MPAs is simple. By restricting fishing access to one particular area, the goal is that fish will be able to reproduce in peace. From this protected area, the 'spillover effect' is anticipated to occur (Russ 2002). Here, the fish that are born within the protected area spill over into the waters surrounding the MPA, therefore increasing the number of fish available for fishers to catch. In theory then, MPAs are widely seen as organised spaces that can satisfy various stakeholders. For conservationists and SCUBA divers, the MPA provides a pristine, untouched habitat where divers can admire the fish and reefs. For those more interested in more general fisheries management, and for the fishers themselves, the MPAs potentially offer an increase in the fish stock *outside* the MPA through the spillover effect. The hope with MPAs then is that while different stakeholders such as local governments, conservationists, dive operators, and fishers may have different motivations for creating MPAs, their end goal should be the same and so the interests of all stakeholders will be satisfied (Roberts and Hawkins 2003). Therefore, in theory, MPAs are different to terrestrial protected areas in that instead of offering a straight payment (in the form of ecotourism or alternative livelihoods) for giving up rights to the resource, the goal is that the MPA *itself* will provide more fishing income in the areas outside, through the spillover effect.

There are some significant concerns with the spillover theory however. As Sale (2002) points out, the science showing that protection works within MPAs is actually much stronger than the science showing that fish stocks increase in the area outside the MPA. He argues that there is 'no evidence that MPAs serve to enhance fishery yields in the region surrounding them to a degree that fully compensates for the loss of fishery access to the area they enclose' (ibid.: 367). Hilborn et al. (2004) also point out some of the limitations of MPAs, noting that they will not work for many other more mobile species, and that the evidence of any positive effects for fisheries more broadly is scarce. Fisheries effects take a long time to occur, and mostly only via adult spillover within a short distance from the edges of the reserve. However, as MPAs 'can provide conservation benefits irrespective of any fishery management benefit they offer' (Sale 2002: 367), the construction of many MPAs indicates a tendency for the interests of conservation to be prioritised over those of fisheries management.

## Links between Marine Protected Areas and Dive Tourism

There is a considerable literature dealing with the ecological bases, fisheries science, and legislation relating to MPAs in the Philippines (for example Pollnac et al. 2001a; Christie et al. 2002; Christie 2005b; Alcala and Russ 2006). In particular, a subset of this literature has addressed the potential relationship between dive tourism and MPAs (Arin and Kramer 2002; Oracion et al. 2005; Depondt and Green 2006; Majanen 2007). In one exploratory study, Arin and Kramer (2002) found that SCUBA divers in the Philippines would be willing to pay a user fee of US\$4 in selected marine sanctuaries. They suggest that by implementing a system of user fees in areas of high dive tourism, potential annual revenue could reach up to US\$1 million in particular diving areas. This revenue, they argue, could support the maintenance of MPAs and provide alternative livelihood opportunities for fishers impacted by the MPAs. Depondt and Green (2006) also point to the potential to raise income through user fees, noting the high level of dive tourism in Southeast Asia and the fact that many of these dives take place within MPAs. They argue that the 'potential of diving user fees to address important funding problems of MPAs is present but not sufficiently exploited' (ibid.: 201). However, they caution that 'the importance of transparency in how the revenue is used is central' (ibid.) to the acceptance among dive operators of user fees, noting the high level of suspicion directed towards governments among many dive operators in Southeast Asia.

A key feature of such literature is the attempt to evaluate and discover features and factors that influence the success of MPAs. In an influential article, Pollnac et al. (2001a) declare that six primary factors appear to be fundamentally important to the success of MPAs in the Philippines:

- population size (relatively small);
- perceived crisis in terms of reduced fish populations before the MPA project is started;
- successful alternative income projects;
- relatively high level of community participation in decision making (high on the democracy scale);
- continuing advice from the implementing organisation; and
- inputs from the municipal government.

Success is broadly defined in terms of several factors such as increases in corals and fish stocks, adherence to the MPA rules and the level of community management.

## The Importance of Social and Political Factors

The factors Pollnac et al. (2001a) analyse are certainly important to the development of MPAs. However in their focus on identifying commonalities between various MPAs, the authors leave somewhat understated the role of local social and political factors that can also shape outcomes. It is also important to bear in mind the experiences of writers such as Van Helden (2004: 99) in Papua New Guinea, who found MPAs 'turn out not to be established on the basis of ecological best practice but more on a fuzzy practice of "making do" with the available means under the existing social and economic circumstances'. In other words, creating and developing MPAs are not merely technical endeavours but are highly dependent on locally contingent social factors that are not easily modelled.

Therefore, it is important to consider the literature that examines some of the social bases and effects of MPAs. Eder (2005) has pointed out the institutional weakness of ICM in another municipality of Palawan, showing that approaches towards and the impacts of MPAs (as well as other elements of ICM) are differentiated by class, gender and ethnicity. Oracion has written the most comprehensive study of the social nature of MPAs in the Philippines; his Ph.D. thesis (2006) addresses the cultural politics of MPA construction in Negros Oriental province. With similar elements of tension between the fishing and tourism industries, he stresses that MPAs are a 'political and cultural space' just as much as a 'space for conservation' (ibid.: vi). Elsewhere, Oracion et al. (2005) point to the impact of MPAs on the livelihood of fishers. They identified significant tensions between the fishery and tourism sectors in Mabini, Batangas, an area of the Philippines where numerous MPAs have been set up to work with dive tourism. They attributed much of this tension to different perceptions of the purpose of an MPA, arguing that 'unless a common understanding

and interpretation of the significance of MPA [sic] is forged among multiple stakeholders its management will continue to be filled with tension and threaten community solidarity' (ibid.: 408). They argue that the tourism and fishing sectors were both interested in MPAs, but that the livelihoods of the tourism sector 'support aesthetic conservation and foster a tourism economy, while those of the [fishing sector] underwrite extractive conservation and a fishing economy'. Ultimately, in Mabini, the tourism sector was able to control the MPA management. Majanen, (2007), working at the same location of the Philippines, found a similar set of tensions in her research. Fishers, according to Majanen, perceived that conservation efforts in the form of MPAs and user fees benefited the tourism sector, while marginalising their livelihoods.

Similarly, MPAs in the Calamianes are inevitably produced and transformed by social and political concerns. My approach here is to focus on how the claims of fishers in particular about poverty, morality and the environment shaped the process of developing MPAs. For fishers, no purely technical, scientific management of MPAs would be fair or legitimate without taking into account their claims. Dive operators, too, felt strongly about their rights to management over the areas covered by the MPAs, but for different reasons. The outcome was a set of debates over conservation and fisheries management that masked the real debates about livelihood and territoriality that lay beneath. Fishers and the dive industry pulled the MPAs in different directions, and the outcomes reflected the ways in which particular groups of people were able to advance their interests successfully. I argue that the perspectives that fishers bring to the creation of MPAs ought to be considered more closely by policymakers, because of the key role they play in shaping the ultimate character of MPAs. In particular, my analysis of these attitudes and practices calls into question the claim that MPAs are able to satisfy all stakeholders.

## Marine Protected Areas in the Calamianes

In the Calamianes, numerous reports, such as those relating to the live fish trade (for example, CI 2003; Padilla et al. 2003), have pointed to the growing impact of a lack of management in coastal areas. Because of these local concerns and the broad national trend that I outlined earlier, the push for MPAs and coastal management has increased in recent years. Before 2004, there were several established MPAs, which were mostly organised and run by resorts in the area. But a stronger push began in 2004, when there was a large effort by a Japanese funded project of the provincial government—SEMP-NP, or the Sustainable Environment Management Project of Northern Palawan—to create a series of MPAs that would work with tourism. The goals of SEMP-NP were to establish a mechanism for the collection of environmental conservation fees in selected areas. In developing the model for the user fees in the Calamianes, the planners

explicitly engaged with the ideas expressed in recent coastal management literature (Arin and Kramer 2002), which indicated that divers were willing to pay user fees for marine conservation (Green 2004). The role of dive tourism in facilitating marine conservation and user fees became the focus of the project. Simply, the idea was that divers coming to dive on the wrecks and on other selected dive sites would pay user fees. These would fulfill two aims: firstly, provide for the maintenance of the marine parks through payment of guards and wardens and their boat, together with marker buoys, signs and ropes. Secondly, a proportion of the funds were also intended to enable local municipalities to support other marine management projects, as well as provide a local barangay development fund to assist those fishers who would be affected by displacement from their fishing grounds. This money was supposed to be for such remedial measures as the development of alternative livelihood projects or the creation of a credit cooperative. After a series of public hearings throughout 2004 and 2005, the specific municipal and barangay ordinances were enacted at the end of 2005. A user fee of ₱100 (US\$2) is now to be paid by each person who dives in the marine parks, and responsibility for management has been devolved to the local coastal communities.



Plate 5-1: Promoting marine protected areas in Coron town.

In 2006–07 there were over a dozen MPAs developed by a range of conservation organisations throughout the Calamianes in various stages of implementation. An important point to note is that many of the MPAs instituted by other organisations were developed for the purposes of conservation and fisheries management—not with the primary goal of engaging with tourism. Their goal was to increase fish stocks, not to provide financial benefits for affected communities. Target sites for these MPAs were selected on mostly ecological grounds that had been determined through extensive marine survey work. At the request of the local communities, however, user fees were incorporated into those MPAs as well. My particular interest in this chapter is to establish how *all* MPAs implemented by various agencies in the Calamianes have been commonly interpreted, understood and adapted to by local fishers.

## Fishers and Marine Protected Areas

The understandings of fishers about the relationship between fishing, morality and poverty discussed in earlier chapters shaped the ideas fishers expressed about the potential regulation of small-scale fisheries through MPAs. In various meetings, informal conversations and through their fishing practices, fishers would fall back on these understandings as a way of legitimating, defending and advancing their interests. I now demonstrate how these understandings would sometimes support the creation of MPAs, and sometimes undermine them. In both instances however, the themes of the poor moral fisher—the lack of responsibility for environmental degradation and the need to address poverty among fishers—were strongly expressed.

I was living in Esperanza during the period of MPA establishment in the Calamianes. I was not present at any of the meetings that were held at Esperanza during the original planning and implementation of the marine park there (2004–05), but I learned a great deal about attitudes towards MPAs through interviews and informal conversations throughout the course of my ongoing research. I visited the neighbouring community of San Andres regularly during 2006–07, and was present for most of the meetings regarding the development of the MPA there. Data about other MPAs in the Calamianes (including those focused on the wrecks) I collected while on short visits to these sites, and interview data from Coron town.

## Esperanza Marine Park: Different Impacts, Different Responses

The example of the Esperanza MPA serves as an introduction to show how fishers' responses to MPAs were shaped primarily by the impact they had on their livelihoods. The Esperanza MPA was an initiative of the SEMP-NP, which included user fees to the snorkelers and divers visiting a popular reef site. Throughout 2004 and 2005, discussions held with community members of Esperanza, dive operators and municipal officials, resulted in the municipal council passing the ordinance to legislate the formation of the Esperanza Marine Park towards the end of 2005. The MPA covers a total area of fifty-two hectares. Fifteen hectares of this is composed of a strict protection or 'no-take' zone, where fishing is prohibited. The location of this zone was calculated from observations made by scientists working on the project, and adjusted for the presence of a large fish cage owned by a resident. The other 37 ha is a 'buffer zone' where certain regulated forms of fishing are allowed, such as the use of hook-and-line. The Esperanza MPA brought in more than ₱150 000 (US\$3000) during 2006 from user fees. Under the ordinance, 45 per cent of this was supposed to go directly back into the project for the provision of necessary items such as marker buoys, ropes, and a boat for the fee collectors. Twenty-five per cent was potentially earmarked to go back into the community in the form of a credit cooperative, through a barangay development fund. The remaining 30 per cent was supposed to return to the municipality for the purposes of future coastal resource management projects. There was ongoing tension over this proposed distribution of payments throughout 2006–07. Unlike many other MPAs in the Calamianes, and indeed the Philippines (White et al. 2002), the Esperanza MPA was extremely well enforced, despite some informal resistance that arose during the year. The strong support of the barangay captain to enforce the MPA and the relatively close location to Coron town (the Coastguard and Police base) were the two key reasons for this.

A survey conducted by those implementing the MPA at Esperanza in 2004 referred to 90 per cent of the community being in favour of the project (Green 2004: 11). It cited the fact that the majority of fishers in Esperanza did not regularly use the reefs within the proposed MPA as the central factor behind this, pointing out that commercial fishing took place much further away. Two years on, during my fieldwork in 2006–07, many of the fishers that supported the MPA notionally still did so, in part presumably because their fishing activities took place well outside the protected zone. In the past, the area had allegedly been a popular haunt for fishers using cyanide, and so some residents believed having the MPA would be a good opportunity to keep these fishers away. Most others simply thought that the user fees would be valuable to the community, or that the presence of tourists would be a good opportunity for

Esperanza to develop its own businesses such as guesthouses or souvenir shops. Some residents already participated in tourism-related industries such as boat carpentry and boat driving, and they saw the creation of the Esperanza MPA as facilitating the growth of these opportunities.

Similar to the MPA that Eder (2005: 159) analysed in San Vicente, however, the MPA at Esperanza negatively affected the poorest fishers. In both San Vicente and Esperanza, the MPA was located close to shore. Because of this, those fishers with pump boats or access to them (or the larger commercial boats as well in the case of Esperanza) were not disadvantaged by the creation of the MPA. Instead, it was only those poorer fishers who paddled out to do their fishing who had to travel further to fish in different grounds.

These fishers grumbled against the existence of the MPA during 2006–07. When I asked one such fisher where his usual fishing grounds were, for example, he responded in a manner typical of many of these affected fishers: ‘Usually I used to fish with hook-and-line just here, you see, just here [points to the area covered by the MPA]. Now, things are harder though, ever since they introduced this ... “Marine Park”, laying emphasis in English on ‘Marine Park’. When I asked him what he meant by his seemingly sarcastic emphasis on these words, he shrugged uncomfortably before saying that he did not understand why the government was trying to introduce things like this that would hurt people like him. ‘I am just a poor fisherman ... the government should be helping people like us, instead of making laws that will hurt us.’

Anecdotal evidence among these fishers and NGO workers suggests that the process of community consultation with this sector had been inadequate, and their voices insufficiently heard.<sup>3</sup> Some other fishermen, who did not previously fish in the MPA area but were sympathetic to those fishermen who did, were also privately critical. Community members who opposed or had reservations about the MPA could not understand the fisheries and conservation logic underlying it: ‘This Marine Park just causes problems for *mga maliit* [the small people] ... if they are trying to make the fishing better they should be concentrating on arresting the illegal fishers instead’, said Miguel, a net fisher. Similarly, Eddie (another net fisher) argued that ‘this Marine Park will just be good for the tourists. They are allowed to go and dive there; why aren’t we allowed to fish there anymore?’

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3 See Eder 2005 for a similar account of the ambiguous nature of ‘participation’. Li (2007: 192–229) also offers an insightful critique of how participation in development projects often proceeds towards pre-defined outcomes.

Other residents were sceptical about the potential benefits of tourism:

The benefits of tourism will only go to the LGU. It will bypass all the fishers. It's fine if you have a relative in the LGU, but most fishers don't have that of course. We are poor people here. If tourism keeps growing, our livelihood will suffer. You come back in five years time and see what will have happened: banned, banned, banned!

Following on from their representation that only illegal fishers cause damage to the environment, such residents argued that the creation of the MPA was ignoring the real problem of illegal fishing and simply punishing the small-scale fisher. In Chapter 7, I detail how these perceptions of MPAs are also strongly linked to perceptions of poor and corrupt governance. Here however, I wish to emphasise how opposition to MPAs was also based on the arguments that I outlined in Chapter 4: that their fishing activities were completely harmless to the environment, and that their poverty ought to be deserving of assistance from the government. Unfortunately for these fishers in Esperanza, however, they were in the minority.

Responses to the Esperanza MPA demonstrate the way in which support for an MPA is determined greatly by whether a fisher stands to lose or benefit economically by its creation. As only a minority stood to lose by the creation of the MPA (the poorer hook-and-line fishers), the MPA was mostly initially supported, despite the reservations of some of the other fishers. As I describe later in this section however, the level of enforcement in Esperanza was significantly stronger than in other areas of the Calamianes. This was a result of contingent factors shaped by the actions and values of locally politically influential characters, and the fact that the MPA was located close to town. While in this case the MPA was implemented and enforcement was maintained, muted complaints continued throughout 2006–07 among those fishers who had been affected. In the next example at San Andres, more fishers were affected by the MPA, and so the discourse of the poor moral fisher was able to achieve more traction.

## Other Marine Protected Areas: Supporting Fishing Practices and Taxing Tourism

Meetings held during the development of other MPAs in the Calamianes show further the ways in which fishers constructed ideas about poverty, morality and fishing, and how they actually shaped outcomes. In these examples, I show how fishers viewed the development of an MPA as a way of constructing a form of marine tenure, or as a way of protecting their own resource use practices. As I introduced earlier, control over waters extending 15 km from the shoreline rests

with the municipality, and only artisanal or municipally registered commercial vessels are (ostensibly) allowed to fish within this area. Outside of this zone, the sea is open to any commercial vessel. Importantly then, there are no barangay or sitio waters under the law. According to numerous NGO workers and government officials who have worked on ICM projects, the barangay will usually have in practice some level of control of waters immediately near its particular land, as is also indicated by the example in Chapter 4 where the baby purse seine boats negotiate with the barangay to fish there. However, the municipality is the smallest political unit in the Philippines that can formally exercise jurisdiction and legislation over marine territory.<sup>4</sup>

I attended several meetings concerning the development of an MPA at San Andres, a neighbouring sitio to Esperanza. Government officials from the municipal Department of Agriculture and an NGO provided technical assistance for this MPA. Unlike the Visayan migrants at Esperanza, the community at San Andres is composed mostly of Indigenous Tagbanuas. Here, farming is the primary livelihood, and fishing is not as prominent as in Esperanza. While some San Andres residents crew on the Esperanza fusilier boats during habagat, there are no commercial boats based in San Andres. The relative ease of farming in San Andres compared to Esperanza is made possible by the presence of a river, which facilitates irrigation, and the availability of secure land tenure.

A key feature of the proposed MPA was to include user fees, which residents demanded as an essential part of the process. During a later meeting discussing how the MPA would benefit local residents, one community leader enthusiastically exhorted the residents of San Andres to get behind the project:

This can be our project ... together we can show everyone that even though we are Tagbanuas, we can manage this place and we have a right to declare who comes into the place, no matter who they are! Tourists will have to ask permission to visit this marine park, and they will have to pay our community to do so!

Explicit in this declaration was that one of the prime roles of the MPA was to 'empower' the community to address some of the massive inequalities between the coastal residents and other more powerful or wealthy figures such as foreign tourists.

Following the standard process for implementation, the San Andres MPA was to be divided into different zones defined by what activities could be allowed

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<sup>4</sup> Recognition of the rights held by Indigenous Tagbanuas to the marine territories surrounding Coron Island (PAFID 2000) made this an exception. However, forms of customary marine tenure such as these and others found in other parts of the Asia-Pacific region (for example Hviding 1996) are relatively uncommon in most parts of the Philippines.

inside. During the first round of community meetings, San Andres residents and NGO workers firstly discussed this point, drawing a large map of where the core zone could be located and what activities could be allowed inside the buffer zone. The core zone was agreed upon relatively easily. This was based primarily upon the manta tow observations that had taken place several weeks earlier by NGO staff, but was adjusted to allow for the presence of several seaweed farms and fish corrals (a type of fish trap) owned by San Andres residents that lay within the proposed core zone. Discussing what activities were to take place within the (much larger) buffer zone was a little more complicated, because of the wide variety of techniques that residents normally used within this zone. It was clear from the animated discussion that residents did not want to give up rights to fish in this area. One by one, San Andres residents spoke about the various fishing gears used. So, by the end of the day, it was provisionally agreed that hook-and-line fishing, crab pots, seahorse fishing, net fishing for the marine ornamental trade, and a specific type of spear fishing were all to be allowed.

Other sorts of fishing activities were banned within the buffer zone. Prominent among these activities was the use of 3-ply, a particular type of gillnet that was widely used among fishers of Esperanza. My companion at this meeting, a community leader from Esperanza, quietly remarked to me at the end of the first meeting that he was going to have a big problem on his hands—virtually all of the 3-ply fishermen from Esperanza used this particular area near San Andres.

The next day another meeting occurred where more details of the proposed MPA were worked out. This time, residents from Esperanza turned up to defend the use of 3-ply in the buffer zone. The main spokesman for the San Andres residents, an older landowner named Ferdinand, argued that 3-ply should be banned from use within the buffer zone. He stated that it was an extremely efficient gear, and that if it was not banned then there would be no point in having an MPA at all. Officers from the Department of Agriculture and the NGO who were providing technical assistance agreed with this interpretation. However, they also were committed to their role as providers of technical assistance only: ‘We just give them the information, and then they decide what to do’ was how one NGO worker at the meeting characterised the process of community-based coastal resource management.

Following much discussion, one fisher from Esperanza got up and made an impassioned defence of the use of 3-ply. He described how 3-ply had been his livelihood for a long time, since 1989, and that there were still plenty of rabbitfish (the targeted species of 3-ply).<sup>5</sup> Cyanide, he emphasised, was the real problem—not 3-ply fishing. The area in the proposed MPA opposite San Andres

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<sup>5</sup> Rabbitfish are a resilient group of fishes that reproduce quickly (FISHBASE 2008).

had been his primary fishing ground for many years, and if he was stopped from fishing there he would have to travel much further to catch enough fish. He was poor, he declared; the creation of this MPA would needlessly bring extra hardship on his family. He pointed out that many of the residents of San Andres had access to alternative incomes through their land ownership and farming, whereas those living in Esperanza were forced to rely virtually exclusively on the sea for their livelihoods:

People here, these people have farms, people can grow cashews, rice, bananas. But, for us in Esperanza, we have to fish everyday! Me, for example, I don't have any land at all, everything I earn is from the sea. This is what I rely on to survive—I am not a rich fisherman, no, I am just a poor fisherman and what I catch is just to survive.

This powerful plea thus explicitly invoked the 'right to survive' (Blanc-Szanton 1972: 129). Here, the underlying notion was that no matter how great the need to reduce fishing pressure around the area, this should not affect his fishing practices. As it was, his net fishing brought him enough income 'just to survive'; any impact on this income would make his life even more difficult. From this view, those in charge of regulating marine resource use had an obligation to ensure that his 'right to survive' was not compromised.

During the open discussion there was a very strong emphasis on speaking politely, and maintaining the proper ways of addressing each other through 'smooth interpersonal relations' (Lynch 1970), but after the meeting concluded a great deal of privately expressed tension was evident. The fishers from Esperanza asserted that Ferdinand was trying to obtain the benefits of the MPA solely for the residents of San Andres. They resented the fact that various techniques such as spear fishing and seahorse fishing were to be allowed within the buffer zone just because these were techniques used by San Andres residents, whereas 3-ply was to be banned because there were very few San Andres residents who used this technique. (The one 3-ply fisher from San Andres who attended the meetings was too afraid to speak up because he had utang na loob, or considerable personal debt, towards Ferdinand). They angrily muttered that the San Andres residents had no legal right to exclude them from the waters near San Andres: 'There is no such thing as *barangay*<sup>6</sup> waters, there is only municipal waters!' They also declared that the Tagbanua people were selfish, citing the common perception among other Filipinos in Coron that 'it is their mentality to take what they can get without doing any work for it'.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, Ferdinand and other residents who supported the banning of 3-ply in the sustainable use

6 Because of its relative isolation, residents often refer to San Andres as a separate barangay even though it is in fact a *sitio* within the same barangay as Esperanza.

7 As I describe later in this chapter, this was the same charge levelled at all Filipino fishers (not just Indigenous Tagbanua) by some foreign tourism operators.

zone were incensed at the behaviour of the 3-ply fishers from Esperanza: 'Can you believe those guys?! They just came here to make sure they could keep on using 3-ply without getting involved in the rest of the project! *May high blood ako!* [I have high blood pressure!]',<sup>8</sup> exclaimed one of the government officials to me after the meeting.

Both groups were clearly acting in their own interests by trying to protect their exploitation patterns, and neither group was seriously interested in regulating their own practices. For the San Andres residents, the MPA seemed to them to offer a way of legitimating their own practices of marine resource use, and excluding the practices of all other fishers. When the Esperanza fishers declared that 'there is no such thing as *barangay* waters, there is only municipal waters', they were in effect resenting the way in which Ferdinand and other residents had attempted to construct an artificial form of marine tenure for the sitio. Esperanza residents opposed the creation of the MPA because it was seen as limiting their patterns of resource use for no good reason. For all of the fishers, the MPA was viewed as something that should support the community, something that was solely about supporting their livelihoods: such MPAs should not impact on existing fishing practices, or do so only minimally, and these MPAs should be accompanied by strong benefits derived from user fees, which should return directly to the communities.

In the end, the debate reached a stalemate, and as of 2010 the MPA is still a 'paper park'. In effect, 3-ply fishing ended up being recognised as a legitimate form of fishing, and the fishers from Esperanza were seen as legitimate claimants. Most likely, this is because they lived nearby and dealt with people from San Andres on a frequent basis: this points again to the importance of maintaining reciprocal social relationships. The way in which the discourse of the poor moral fisher in this instance received a favourable audience indicates that the likelihood of success when 'appealing for pity' depends at least in part on establishing and maintaining ongoing social relationships.

Examples from other MPAs in the Calamianes conform to the practice of using MPAs to support local fishing practices. In Langko, an isolated, island barangay, one MPA had been developed that encircled one of the smaller islands, Dera. A dispute had been taking place over the ownership rights of Dera for several years. A wealthy family from Coron town claimed to have bought the island in the 1970s from the indigenous Tagbanua landowners in order to harvest pebbles from the beach. Subsequently, they sold Dera to a Realty Corporation, which then came and tried to auction it. The local Tagbanua residents of Langko objected, saying the island was never sold. They claimed hereditary rights over it, as a part of their broader Ancestral Domain Claim throughout that region

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<sup>8</sup> This is a common Taglish expression in the Philippines indicating anger or tension.

of the Calamianes (this claim was still in dispute during 2006–07). So, when a national NGO arrived with the intention of creating several MPAs, local residents strongly supported the idea of creating an MPA around Dera Island. In this MPA, hook-and-line, spearfishing and squid jigs—the primary fishing techniques used by the resident Tagbanuas on the island—were allowed to be used within the MPA, and other fishing techniques not used by the residents (such as 3-ply) were banned.<sup>9</sup> User fees were introduced here as well, as one NGO worker explained: ‘The idea with imposing user fees is to let the communities control tourism, not let tourism control them’. Like other conservationist NGOs operating in the Philippines, this NGO is explicit about the need for social justice to be incorporated into conservation. Indeed, one of these NGO workers told me that MPAs such as these were meant to be a ‘bargaining chip for local communities to use against more powerful outsiders’. The MPA at Dera can definitely be viewed as a way of protecting local Tagbanua rights over the waters and the island itself.

A final brief example of how the presence of MPAs can be used to exclude outsiders is from Bedalo, another small island barangay. At Bedalo, an MPA had been proposed at one particular end of the island, but by 2007 the negotiations had not been completed and the necessary ordinances had not been created. When 3-ply fishers from Esperanza went to fish near Bedalo, residents of Bedalo frequently accused them of poaching and fishing illegally within an MPA. This was despite the MPA not having been legislated yet, and the 3-ply fishing occurring on the other end of the island from where the proposed MPA actually was. In this instance, unlike in San Andres, Esperanza fishers did not have much contact with residents of Bedalo, and it is unlikely that they had managed to form many social relationships of sufficient depth for the discourse of the poor moral fisher to find a sympathetic audience and ‘succeed’. As indicated earlier, fishing in inshore areas close to land (unlike live grouper fishing conducted on reefs that were usually located further offshore) usually required some sort of permission of the local barangay or sitio authorities by outsiders. The development of MPAs serves as an opportunity for local fishermen to strengthen boundaries against these outsiders.

In 2006–07, most of the MPAs in the Calamianes (other than the Esperanza Marine Park) had a very low level of enforcement; many were to a significant degree simply ‘paper parks’. When approaching the MPAs based around the shipwrecks, for example, dive operators would frequently report that they had seen fishers fishing on top of the wrecks before approaching the dive boats to extract their user fees. Other MPAs had some level of enforcement during

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<sup>9</sup> During 2006–07, negotiations were underway for a second MPA in Langko; this MPA included regulations on local fishers.

the day, but were unable to continue this during the night. The low level of enforcement of local fishers suggests that they felt that they still had a right to fish there.

The development of MPAs in the Calamianes therefore shows how fishers use the discourse of the poor moral fisher to assert various claims. When fishers do support MPAs, they use them as a means to increase or maintain their own levels of exploitation while trying to gain benefits out of the tourism industry. The rationale behind this support for these MPAs has less to do with conservation or even fisheries management per se, but more to do with the view that: 1) small-scale fishing of the type practiced by fishers in the areas covered by MPAs is environmentally harmless and as such should not be subject to regulation (as opposed to cyanide); and 2) these fishers are extremely poor, and to reduce their ability to fish would be to impinge upon their 'right to survive'. From this perspective, rules for MPAs should not be based on abstract principles of scientific management, but on principles of social equity. Therefore, when support comes it aims to minimise impacts on fishers, and maximise the benefits of tourism. I now turn to a discussion of how tourism operators received these claims, and countered them with claims of their own.

## **Responses to Fishers' Claims**

There were three diving operators in Coron town during 2006–07, and at least half a dozen others based on isolated resorts in different locations of the Calamianes. More operators arrived between 2007 and 2010. In 2006–07, all of the owners and dive instructors (although not all of the divemasters) were foreigners from Western countries. There were various other tourism operators from Western countries as well, including hotel/guesthouse operators and restaurateurs. The creation of the MPAs was cause for a great deal of debate, argument and resentment during this period of my fieldwork research. I focus now on the grievances of the tourism operators and how such grievances are related to perceptions of the Philippines and its people, and perceptions of marine ownership and territoriality.

### **Tourism Operators: Marine Protected Areas as a 'Money Grab'**

The most commonly articulated complaint by tourism operators in Coron was that the MPAs were quite simply not about conservation at all, but about getting money for the local communities and the local government. Essentially, MPAs

legitimated what they viewed as a quest among local communities for 'easy money'. Various quotes made by members of the tourism industry make it clear that they resented the claims by communities for benefits out of the MPAs.

I call them 'collecting stations' because they are just about making money.

They are just trying to make money out of the dive industry.

They're just a money grab.

They have a carrier pigeon now; it flies around telling all the communities about how to get easy money.

They cited other examples from the region where local communities had been given control over the management of natural resources, such as when the indigenous Tagbanua community had been granted Ancestral Domain over Coron Island. There, they pointed out, rubbish had accumulated on the various beaches tourists frequented, and the facilities at these beaches and other tourist destinations on the island such as the renowned Kayangan Lake had fallen into disrepair through lack of care and maintenance. Their complaint was that once the communities were given control of the dive sites and MPAs, a similar situation would occur. For example, one dive instructor complained to me that fishers constantly stole the marker buoys and the ropes for the wrecks, and he was the one who had to constantly replace them. He doubted whether residents had the energy or capacity to follow up on this. Other dive instructors voiced their frustration when they saw local fishers fishing in the MPAs while waiting for the dive boats to turn up. As soon as the dive boats arrived, according to these instructors, the fishers would then request user fees from the boatload of tourists. They argued that if the only motivation for having these protected areas was for money, there was little incentive to actually protect the areas, and that the conservationist 'spin' that had been placed on these projects was nothing more than a sham hiding the desire on the part of the local government to make money out of the dive industry. They pointed out that if the local government really wanted to conserve the areas, they would reduce the numbers of pearl farms, which were located right next to and in some cases within the MPAs. Although to my knowledge no scientific studies have been conducted on the polluting impacts of these pearl farms, some dive operators alleged that underwater visibility on the wrecks had decreased significantly since the pearl farms began production. For many of those in the dive industry, the issue of concern was not so much the imposition of user fees per se, but what was to be done with the money.

For other members of the dive industry, another more general argument that they voiced against the MPAs was that the ocean should be completely open

access. From this perspective, nobody, not even the government, had the right to place user fees on bodies of water such as reefs because they were publicly owned. Therefore, these dive operators argued, if divers had to pay a ₱100 tax for simply diving and looking at the wrecks and reefs—taking nothing from them—fishers should have to pay a much larger tax for what one dive operator termed ‘stealing fish from the ocean’.<sup>10</sup>

Many of these concerns of the tourism operators about the MPAs were legitimate, and clearly and honestly communicated. Similar concerns have been reported in other areas of the Philippines (Depondt and Green 2006; Oracion 2006). Their concerns however, were closely related to and tapped into more deeply held feelings about Filipinos and the Philippines, and fishers in particular, which they had built up over many years of living in the country. Such feelings varied, and became even more diverse as more and more tourism operators arrived each year. For some tourism operators, however, fishers were typically depicted as somewhat of a caricature that could be seen among many foreign expatriates, and indeed among many more well-off Filipinos. Fishers are ignorant, they are poor, they will do anything for ‘easy money’, and left to their own devices they will inevitably deplete the seas of every last fish. As I introduced in Chapter 2, fishers from the Visayan region, in particular, are subject to this stereotyping. Those in the tourism industry who had lived in Palawan for many years spoke pessimistically of the direction of environmental management. One particularly despairing operator stated that: ‘When I first came here [Palawan], the place was beautiful. The forests were covered, the reefs were still there. Now, they have completely fucked the place up’. Another said that: ‘Well when I first came here you used to be able to see the little *tambakol* [tuna] jumping out of the water just over there [points to the nearby waters metres away from his resort], then a few years later you had to go a bit further over to those islands [points to islands further away] and now it’s difficult to see them in the whole area anymore’.

Tourism operators were discouraged by various practices that caused them to view fishers in this pessimistic manner. The persistent habits of using cyanide and dynamite to catch fish were two such practices which directly undermined the livelihood of the tourism industry by destroying the very products they sold—coral reefs and fish. Tourism operators often talked of the ‘mentality’ of the local fishers, recognising that they were very poor, but arguing that they could never see past the demands of today. I was reminded of this perception when one foreign resident asked me about the attitudes of the fishers I lived with: ‘So Mike, you live with these people—are there any of them who actually think illegal fishing is a bad thing? I mean are there any of them at all who actively don’t do it?’ The underlying belief behind his question was that all fishers were by default involved in illegal fishing, a common assumption among some foreign

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10 During 2006, the tax on a box of commercially sold fish was just forty pesos.

residents in Coron. Arguing that education was the key to changing long-term attitudes, one Filipino tourism worker and conservationist said that '[t]alking to these fishermen ... it is like teaching a small child. At first they don't know why something is bad, but eventually they learn'. The quotes expose a conviction shared among many tourism operators that combined with poverty, the main problem in fisheries governance was ignorance and a narrow-minded hunger for resources that was believed to motivate poorer fishers. As one dive operator stated, he was very aware that he lived in a developing country and there had to be development, but he wanted the development to be 'smarter'. He asserted that if the 'mentality' of these Filipinos were to change, 'smart' development would be possible.

Those in the tourism industry thus reframed the moral appeals of those in the fishing communities as symptomatic of a 'mentality' that emphasised victimhood and reinforced a culture of poverty. Claims about a social vision of equality by Filipinos were contemptuously treated as wishful thinking, hopes that, in the absence of hard work and creative thinking, the benevolence of foreigners would support them. The foreigners saw MPAs as a typical example of the 'crab mentality', whereby the only way to get to the top is by pulling someone else down.

The local government was understood in even less favourable terms than the fishers. 'A bunch of inbred crooks' was how one tourism operator characterised the local municipal council (*sangguniang bayan*), referring to their penchant for dynastic, alliance politics which meant that most of the members were related to each other in some way. Tourism operators were even more critical of these characters, because according to them, the politicians should have been the ones to see past short-term financial goals, and try to manage the marine areas in a proper and sustainable fashion. A common criticism of the local government was that they were essentially trying to 'have it both ways'. They wanted to have the appearance of having protected areas and conservation, but they were not prepared to actually seriously protect these areas, nor were they prepared to limit any potential revenue from the allegedly polluting pearl farms: 'They want to have their cake and eat it too', as one foreign resident suggested.

## Personal Investments and Territoriality of Tourism Operators

Many of the concerns among foreigners in the tourism industry about user fees, management and Filipinos can be understood more fruitfully by examining their personal contexts. When referring to the classification of those in the dive industry in his thesis, Oracion (2006: 83) asserts that 'despite their financial contributions the tourism brokers are still treated as outsiders whose attachment

to the MPAs is primarily business and recreation unlike the local fishers whose ways of life or culture are directly altered by their innovations'. It is unclear from the language used whether this is Oracion's actual view, or whether it is simply the dominant local perception. Either way, I would argue that such a view is unnecessarily narrow. Such a focus on business and 'recreation' ignores the very significant personal commitments that many in the tourism industry have made in the Philippines.

For the dive operators, the oceans and especially the wrecks are viewed as 'their patch'. That is, through superior technical skills of navigation and the use of SCUBA, they have clearly marked out an area in the Calamianes where they are the acknowledged authorities. Before the introduction of the marine parks, the various dive companies had jointly managed the diving areas, setting a boat to moor every night on one of the popular reef dives, and pooling funding for things like marker buoys and ropes. They highly value the sense of local knowledge that they have about the waters of the Calamianes. Local knowledge of the wreck dives is particularly valued. Penetrating some sections of some of the deeper wrecks involves technically challenging (and potentially dangerous) diving, and instructors need a great deal of experience on these particular dives before they can safely guide other divers through them. The Calamianes has a reputation as having some of the best wreck dives in Asia, and highly experienced wreck divers from prominent diving clubs around the world will sometimes converge in the area. Being able to guide some of these serious divers through technically challenging dives is a source of pride among the more experienced operators and instructors. This sort of local knowledge can be characterised as practical, material knowledge born of experience—not the disengaged, alienated 'globe' view of the environment that Ingold (1993) has characterised as typical of the modern Westerner. As Carrier (2001) has described Westerners' personal engagements with the marine environment in Jamaica, this example can show the dangers of essentialisation and the diverse ways in which 'Westerners' can perceive their environments.

Dive operators felt that over a long period of diving in those waters day-after-day, year-after-year that they were entitled to a significant say over any rule changes to the management of the waters. This was legitimated, for example, by one of the larger dive shops naming the Esperanza reef as their 'house reef', mooring one of their boats there each night to deter fishers. As Oracion (2006: 145) points out with regard to a similar naming of reefs in Negros Oriental, calling the reefs 'house reefs' 'implies some sense of ownership by virtue of proximity and symbolizes free access' for the dive operators.

Tourism operators also fiercely criticised what they viewed as the rampant corruption in Filipino and Coron society among members of the local political elite. While they saw this evidence of corruption in many areas of life, in

particular they resented the ways in which they felt they were targeted in particular, as foreign members of the society who clearly stood out. One tourist operator recounted to me his frustrations. He had lived in Coron for more than 20 years, was married to a Filipina with children and held a clear commitment to the place with his lifelong business. Despite this, he related that in public meetings and everyday life he was tarred with the allegation of being a rich, arrogant foreigner coming to Coron to exploit its resources and not leave anything for the locals. Tourism operators were convinced that, while relatives of local politicians could get away with activities such as cyanide fishing, any tiny infraction of theirs would be punished heavily. Often, they felt as if they were resources for the locals to exploit any way they could. Indeed, it is important here to recognise the complex personal histories of many of the dive operators who have married locally. In doing so, as many Filipinos put it with a big smile, they have 'married the family' as well. Most of them thus become people who are subjected to claims for resources by Filipino family members and are under intense social pressure to redistribute their relative wealth. From this perspective, the creation of MPAs can be understood in personal terms as well. The imposition of user fees tapped into a feeling among dive operators that they were being used and exploited, yet again.

For the tourism operators, the entry by the local government and communities into the realm of dive tourism management was an irritating affront to what was in their eyes, the one area of their lives where they could maintain independence, free from local corruption and patronage. Tourism more generally in Coron is sometimes represented by these foreign tourist operators as a realm of activity that can only be done by foreigners. Some talked of how local rural Filipinos did not understand the mindset of foreigners, and would never be able to provide the same level of customer service that foreigners expect: 'They need a foreigner, someone who is experienced in Western ways, to show them how to do customer service. For example, when I ask for something in a shop here, I always get the response "No we don't have". That is not OK for a Westerner! You need to apologise, make them feel better'.

These sorts of complaints were related to concerns that the system of user fees was highly uncoordinated, irritating tourists and therefore driving away the market. For example, a typical day out taking in the tourist activities could involve a trip to the wrecks, paying a ₱100 bill, then a trip to a coral reef MPA, paying another ₱100 bill, or a trip to a beach on Coron Island, paying another small bill, or a trip to the hot springs, paying yet another small bill. Their fears were that the imposition of MPAs would actually drive away tourism because of what they viewed as the inevitably disorganised and intrusive method of implementation by local Filipinos.

During the early part of 2006, tensions about the MPAs were overt. Some dive operators maintained an informal boycott on some of the reef MPAs, visiting only the wrecks, which formed the core Calamianes dive sites. ‘Why do you want to help those fucking people?’ called out one boycotting dive instructor to a non-boycotting instructor as he got on a boat to go to the Esperanza MPA. One group of dive operators mounted a claim that a part of the reef was actually part of the Ancestral Domain of the Tagbanua group living on nearby Coron Island, and so refused to pay user fees when visiting this part of the reef. This alerted the Tagbanuas to the possibility of claiming territoriality over the area, and they subsequently began demanding user fees from the dive operators as well. The issue was settled only when the MPA Ordinance was hastily amended later in the year to more explicitly include this section of the reef, thus ensuring that user fees for the MPA would be required. As the year progressed, the informal boycott grew less effective and it appeared that dive operators began to accept the inevitability of the situation. A lack of unified and clear representation hindered any possibilities of offering effective resistance, and while grumbling continued at the bars and dive shops, there was little they could do as long as the LGU was committed to maintaining the MPAs.

The creation of the MPAs was seen by foreign tourism operators as an entry into the one of the few spheres of life where they had managed to maintain relative freedom, control and dominance. In this way, the desire for the dive operators to maintain their management system over the MPAs can be partly seen as an assertion of both their physical, and metaphorical, territorial claims over marine territory and marine tourism and helps explain their cynicism about the potential for successful management. Claims by fishers and the support given to these claims by the municipal government were rejected as illegitimate.

## Local Government Unit Perspectives and Marine Protected Area Developments

Attitudes towards MPAs among local government officials were typical of their broader attitudes about tourism in the Calamianes. As I described in Chapter 2, the local government of Coron especially is interested in developing the municipality as an ecotourism hub of the Philippines. MPAs are seen as one way to achieve this: as well as any actual conservation value that may accrue as a result of the MPA, the mere act of creating an MPA gives greater legitimacy to claims that Coron is a paradise for ecotourism. Prominent events such as then President Arroyo visiting Coron and opening one of the MPAs in 2005, the Esperanza MPA featuring on a national television program during 2006, and the US Ambassador opening the San Andres MPA in 2007 gave further authority to these claims. For the LGU then, the MPAs can be seen partly as a successful public relations exercise for Coron as a part of its aims of attracting greater levels

of tourism. Not to be too cynical, there were also undoubtedly members of the local council who were concerned about fish declines and felt that MPAs were one way of addressing them.

LGU officials were not unaware of the concerns that fishers had about tourism, however. Indeed, to ignore these concerns completely would be to alienate their bases of support. During interviews, some politicians in the LGU expressed concern that tourism would not be as profitable as fishing, and would not be able to replace it entirely: 'Tourism is a good thing' said one municipal councillor. 'And here in Coron, there are plenty of opportunities to promote tourism here. But we have to be careful with tourism that we don't hurt the small fishermen. They don't speak English, they don't know how to do tourism and they have no interest in tourism'. Similarly, another municipal councillor told me that 'tourism is good, but realistically it will never replace fishing completely.'

The goals of the municipality were thus to increase tourism yet minimise the impact on the livelihoods of fishers. Lax enforcement of fishing regulations by barangay and municipal officials can be understood more easily in this context. One government official in another part of Palawan, for example, related how the explicit appeals of fishers when they are caught make punishments difficult to enforce. When a local fisher was caught using a banned compressor, he brought his entire extended family into the office of the mayor and made a great show of appealing for pity, asking the mayor how would he be able to feed this family if he was fined or were to be imprisoned. While LGU officials want the benefits of tourism, they do not want to marginalise their constituents, and are vulnerable to claims from local clients. As I discuss in Chapter 7, when I examine the traditional role of politicians in the Philippines, local leaders are expected to support residents' resource use patterns in exchange for their political support (Russell 1997: 91). Abstract rules that damage the livelihoods of people who are already poor are seen as cruel and unnecessary, whatever their alternative scientific or financial justification may be. The claims of fishers with regard to MPAs, and their discourse of the poor moral fisher, found supportive listeners in their LGU in this instance. Showing pity to fishers who break the rules is a way to gain political capital, thus reducing the incentives for strong enforcement of marine protected areas.



**Plate 5-2: Typical boat used to take tourists on day trips.**

## Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated how the responses of fishers to the development of MPAs are framed by a discourse that emphasises the poverty of fishers, the unfairness of regulating fishing practices, and the rights of fishers to extract user fees from the tourism industry. Fishers here appeal to the members of the local government, those in the tourism industry and the NGO workers assisting with the implementation of the MPAs. If MPAs are to be instituted, they argue, they should have minimal impact on existing fishing practices, and should actively provide benefits to fishers. MPAs are viewed here as interventions that should assist the livelihood of poor fishers.

The ways in which MPAs in the Calamianes have been contested has some important policy implications. MPAs are often viewed as an excellent tool by conservationists and, less often, by those coming from a perspective focused more on fisheries management. This is because MPAs have, in theory, both the strict protection zone so favoured by conservationists who wish to protect biodiversity, and also the spillover effect, which appeals to those who wish to increase the level of fish stocks outside of the MPA. They therefore aim to

satisfy all stakeholders, including the tourism industry and fishers. In this chapter, I have shown that in the Calamianes during 2006–07 at least, such a characterisation is not correct.

The aims and motivations of fishers, dive operators and conservationists are very different. As Oracion (2003) reported for a similar situation in Batangas, the original motivations for supporting an MPA among local fishers were overwhelmingly (95 per cent) because of the potential they saw for a 'sustainable subsistence fishery', as opposed to resource conservation, which drew zero responses (*ibid.*: 113). The responses of regulators and private tourism brokers however, focused on the potential for resource conservation and tourism revenue. Similarly, Christie et al. (2003: 319) have argued that the motives of different stakeholders are closely linked to the sustainability of coastal resource management institutions. They point out that where interests and motives clash, the potential for conflict may exist after the project or organisation implementing the MPA has left the site.

In the MPA meetings and discussions, I observed in the Calamianes, the aims of fishers with regard to the MPA were strongly directed towards what they saw as an opportunity to protect their patterns of exploitation. This is primarily because of their representations about fishing—legal fishing is harmless, moral and associated with poverty; illegal fishing is harmful to the environment, immoral and associated with a higher level of wealth. Fishers claim that their activities have a negligible effect on the environment and that MPAs should be about taxing those resource users rich enough to afford it (the tourists), basing their arguments on a vision of social fairness. These perceptions have influenced the process of implementing MPAs in several ways. Core zones have often been minimised as much as possible and seen as a concession to conservationists, buffer zones have been adapted to include the fishing techniques and gears of local fishers, and enforcement has rarely been effective when it has been conducted by locals.

In contrast to the fishers, dive operators have understood the role of MPAs as primarily about conservation. From this perspective, any revenue gained from user fees should go towards management and enforcement costs. Strongly affected by the transfer of management to communities, and the imposition of user fees, their responses were very negative. They argued that the communities' approach to MPAs was not about conservation at all; this was just a sham hiding the real desire among local government officials and communities to make money out of the dive industry. The dive operators framed their argument about the impacts of their actions in direct opposition to the arguments of fishers. They argued that in contrast to the fishers, who 'steal fish from the ocean' and indulged in irresponsible environmental behaviour, diving activities had no negative environmental impact and so should be free of charge. They based

their arguments on the logic of good environmental management, and I have demonstrated some of the underlying territorial concerns that also lay behind these arguments. For the LGU, MPAs have been seen as a way in which to expand its own territorial claims over tourism, and so MPAs have been generally enthusiastically supported. Within this supportive context for MPAs however, fishers' claims have also been privileged, thus reducing the capacity for effective enforcement of the MPAs.

The status of MPAs in the Calamianes could be seen during 2006–07 as somewhat ambiguous—many were being created, but all of them were marked by serious limitations. These shortcomings and ambiguities were a direct result of the discourse of the poor moral fisher that formed the basic perspective of fishers when it came to negotiating MPAs. Whether the MPAs are able to produce the kind of increase in fish stocks desired by the conservationists remains unclear because of these shortcomings.

From this perspective, the proliferation of MPAs can be understood not so much as a victory for conservation or wise fisheries management, but as a way in which fishers and local government officials have been able to successfully assert their territorial claims and advance their interests. The development of MPAs in the Calamianes is fundamentally a social process, one that is shaped by specific ideas about poverty and the environment, and the local political contexts in which these ideas are expressed.