

Keyword: global-warming

Headline: Reef alert

Byline: Philippine Daily Inquirer

Published Date: 12:30 AM October 09, 2016

Section: opinion

Word Count: 676

Content:

There is no way attention will be directed at the crying urgency of protecting the coral reefs unless we belabor the issue and repeat ourselves. At the rate coral reefs are being destroyed by human activity or damaged by bleaching due to global warming, it won't be long before these "colorful gardens under the sea where marine life thrives" die off, never to be appreciated by future generations.

Indeed, though the Philippines is "the richest place on earth" in terms of biodiversity, according to scientist Wilfredo Licuanan, he has warned that because of climate change, "we can lose our corals in a matter of weeks, not years."

There is, thus, not a moment to lose. Inquirer correspondent Yolanda Sotelo reports that at the Hundred Islands National Park in Pangasinan, divers search for fragments of live coral in the waters for nurturing in the coral nursery or planting in the sea bed. The coral regeneration program is financed by the Department of Science and Technology and the Philippine Council for Agriculture, Aquatic and Natural Resources Research and Development, and implemented by Pangasinan State University and the city government of Alaminos. The intention is clear: "We do not introduce anything that can't be found in the sea, such as artificial reefs; we are replanting dislodged corals," said Virna Salac, coral reef restoration national coordinator.

Pollution is also wreaking havoc on coral reefs: Plastic waste, for example, "smothers corals," according to World Wide Fund for Nature Philippines head Joel Palma. (Additionally, the Philippines will lose at least 59 fish species endemic to the reefs in the coming 25 years because of overharvesting and illegal fishing, said the environmental group Haribon. "The belief we once had that the sea is of unlimited resource is not true. The alarming loss of fishes is telling us that there's not much time left for action," Haribon project manager Margarita N. Lavides said in a statement. "We are slowly losing once-common, wide-ranging, yet inherently large vulnerable reef fishes [that] have very important ecological roles.")

At the International Coral Reef Symposium held at the East West Center in Hawaii last June, marine scientists John McManus and Ed Gomez reported that much of the rich coral colonies in the South China Sea had been destroyed by China's construction of artificial islands in the area. McManus pointed out that a "Scarborough peace park" could be established in the disputed area, and "could be the foot in the door for the entire situation" involving maritime territorial disputes. He suggested that China and the Philippines resolve their disagreement in order to save the reef that the Philippines calls Panatag, and which it considers among its traditional fishing grounds. Said McManus: "Scarborough reef is in a critical stage. If China builds [an island] there, it's going to be a horrible waste. This is probably the most beautiful reef in the world."

Environmentalist Antonio Claparols, president of the Ecological Society of the Philippines, is part of a broad, continuing effort to establish that marine peace park in the South China Sea. Last month, he and his colleagues presented an emergency motion to that effect, titled "Conservation in the South China Sea," at the 6th World Conservation Congress held in Hawaii. The motion reads in part: "[T]he coral colonies in the [South China Sea] are five times more diverse than anywhere in the world, and they serve to protect, replenish and rehabilitate the fisheries and natural resources of

the Pacific Ocean.”

“But to our dismay,” Claparols said, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature rejected it.

The continuing deterioration of coral reefs is a distressing phenomenon that is happening worldwide. In the Philippines, where coral reefs help sustain the livelihoods of millions and continue to draw tourists because of their beauty, it behooves everyone to add voice and effort to the cause. Once the reefs are gone, there is no replacing them.

It's crunch time.

Subscribe to our daily newsletter

By providing an email address. I agree to the Terms of Use and acknowledge that I have read the Privacy Policy.