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# INFORMATION SHEET ON TUBBATAHA REEFS NATIONAL MARINE PARK

**1. Date this sheet was completed:**

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Designated date

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Sire Reference Number

22/03/99 (see filename)

**2. Country :** Republic of the Philippines

**3. Name of Wetland :** Tubbataha Reefs National Marine Park

**4. Geographical coordinates:**

The Tubbataha Reefs National Marine Park is located in the middle of the Central Sulu Sea between 119° 45' and 120° E longitude and 8 ° 45'-9 ° 00 N latitude. It is approximately 98 nautical miles southeast of Puerto Princesa City.

**5. Altitude:**

Sea Level. Most of the Park area is submerged with few permanent emergent sand clay islands.

**6. Area:** 33,200 has.

**7. Overview:**

The Tubbataha reefs are well known among fishermen in the Southern Philippines and scuba divers from around the world. Tubbataha is a word which means a long reef exposed at low tide. It is considered the largest coral reef atoll in the Philippines. The reef harbors a diversity of marine life equal or greater to any such area in the world. Forty-six (46) coral genera and more than 300 coral species were recorded and at least 40 families and 379 species of fish. Sea turtles, sharks, tuna, dolphins and jackfish are a commonly found in the reefs.

**8. Wetland type:**

Marine-coastal – Coral reefs

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25 JAN 2000  
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## 9. Ramsar Criteria

- 1 (a) - It is particularly good representative example of a natural or near-natural wetland, characteristic of the appropriate biogeographical region
  - 2 (a) - It supports an appreciable assemblage of rare, vulnerable or endangered species of plant and animal, or an appreciable number of individuals of any or more of these species.
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## 10. Map of site included: Yes

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## 11. Name and address of compiler :

Protected Areas and Wildlife Bureau  
Department of Environment and Natural Resources  
Quezon Avenue, Diliman, Quezon City

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## 12. Justification of criteria :

Tubbataha Reefs National Marine Park (TRNMP) contains a unique example of pristine coral reefs with a very high diversity of marine resources.

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## 13. General Location:

TRMNP is located in the center of the Sulu Sea. It is about 150 km. Southeast of Puerto Princesa City in Palawan. Tubbataha is a part of the Municipality of Cagayancillo Islands, which is about 80 kms to the northeast. It is also one-third of the straight distance from Puerto Princesa to Zamboanga City in Mindanao.

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## 14. Physical features:

Tubbataha Reefs consists of two coral atolls oriented southwest to northeast which is separated by an eight (8) km. wide channel. The north reef is longer. It is about 16 km long and 4.5 km wide. The south reef is about 5 km. long and 3 km. wide. A coral islet (Bird Islet), about three hectares in area, is located near the northeast end of the north reef. A smaller islet, located near the southernmost end of the south reef, supports a lighthouse which was constructed in 1980.

Coral communities have developed on the slopes and rims of submerged mountains or islands. The north and south reefs have both large inner lagoon and sandy areas. (Alcala, 1993). Tubbataha atolls have shallow reef flatforms of coralline origin, which at some points are exposed during extreme low tide.

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### 15. Ecological features:

The northeast monsoon winds are believed to contribute to the predominantly westward movement of the currents in the Sulu Sea. As hypothesized by Dolar and Alcala (1993), the westward flow of the current helps transport fish and decapod eggs and larvae to the eastern coast of Palawan Island. Thus, Palawan reefs and Tubbataha reefs may be biologically interconnected. It is therefore reasonable to assume that the Tubbataha Reefs are an important source of larvae for coral reef fish populations in eastern Palawan. Palawan is known to contribute a sizeable proportion of the nation's fish catch.

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### 16. Noteworthy flora:

There are only two species of trees of the family Euphorbiaceae recorded in the atoll (NRMC, 1982). Benthic marine vegetation of Tubbataha Reefs consist of four (4) species of seagrasses and about 43 species of algae. Both seagrasses and algae form extensive beds in shallow areas in both North and South Islets. The dominant macroalgae are *Caulerpa urvilliana* and *Turbinaria*. Seagrasses abound in the shallow sandy areas.

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### 17. Noteworthy fauna:

The fish fauna is represented by at least 40 families and 379 species observed in one survey in 1982. Hawksbill, green turtles, manta (myliobatids) and stingrays (dasyatids), and at least 6 species of sharks are common in Tubbataha. Pelagic tunas, mackerel, jack and others are found in the area. Four species of dolphins have been sighted in the vicinity of the atolls and two species of whales have been seen, the Black tip shark, *Carchariunus melanopterus* and White-tip shark, *Triaenodon obsesus* (Dolar and Alcala, 1993).

The North Reef is a rookery of the Brown Boobies *Sula leucogaster*, the Red-footed Boobies, *S. sula*, and the tern *Sterna* species. The South Reef is the rookery of a variety of birds including Red-footed Boobies, Brown Boobies, the Common noddy *Anous stolidus*, the Sooty tern *Sterna fuscata* and the Crested Tern *Sterna bergii*. Marine turtles probably *Chelonia mydas* nest on many beaches of the South Reef and North Reef as evidenced by turtle tracks, dug up nests and dried carapaces (NRMC, 1982).

A diverse coral assemblage with about 46 coral genera has been recorded in the area. Coral cover reaches 70-80% on many parts of the reef slope and edge, but decreases towards the algal ridge surge zones, back reef, and lagoon.

Tridacnid clams are common. Helmetshells, *Cassis cornuta* and chambered nautilus are found in some parts of the lagoon.

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**18. Social and cultural values:**

No permanent inhabitants are found inside the Park. During fishing seasons, however, the indigenous inhabitants of Cagayancillo and fishermen from other parts of the country establish temporary shelter in the area.

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**19. Land tenure/ownership:**

State-owned

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**20. Current land use:**

Tubbataha Reef is one of the top SCUBA diving destinations in the Philippines. Although the reefs are not easily accessible, many local and foreign divers visit them usually between March and June. Diving continues until the end of the southwest monsoon but is limited after June. Snorkeling is possible in all shallow portions of the reef. It is fast becoming a popular sport fishing area.

A wide range of fishing activities are carried out around the reefs including the traditional hook and line, commercial trawling for tuna, spearfishing, offshore long lines, aquarium fish collection and general reef gleaning nearshore.

People from Cagayancillo also periodically visit the reefs to collect the eggs of nesting birds such as the boobies.

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**21. Adverse factors affecting the ecological character of the site:**

There has been much physical damage on the reef in recent years because of the rampant use of destructive fishing using dynamite and cyanide. Coral rubble was observed in areas where blast fishing occurred. Minor anchor damage was noted at the sites, which were frequented by dive boats and fishermen.

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**22. Conservation measures taken:**

The following are the conservation measures relative to the protection and management of Tubbataha:

1. Tubbataha was proclaimed as a National Marine Park by virtue of Proclamation 306 in 1988 to protect and preserve the coral reef atoll with its abundant and diverse reef assemblage, including the marine turtles and waterbirds found roosting in the area.



2. In 1990, a Memorandum of Agreement was forged into by the DENR and Tubbataha Foundation for the protection, conservation and preservation of the pristine condition of the marine resources for sustenance of the marine life in Tubbataha and vicinity and the development of the recreation potential of the marine park under the concept of ecotourism for the benefit and enjoyment of the local and foreign tourist and of the present and future generations.
  3. A 5-year framework plan was prepared by the Protected Areas and Wildlife Bureau and the Tubbataha Foundation in 1992 to provide direction in the management of the Park. The above-mentioned plan was not implemented due to lack of funds.
  4. A Presidential Task Force for TRNMP was formed in 1995 and is co-chaired by the DENR Secretary and the Palawan Council for Sustainable Development. Local Government units and the Kabang Kalikasan ng Pilipinas (a non-government organization) are also members of the Task Force. The Task Force came up with a one-year interim action plan to protect the reefs. The plan is envisioned to set the stage for the development and actual implementation of a sustained, effective and long-term management that would ensure the conservation of the resources of Tubbataha.
  4. The Environmental Legal Assistance Center, a Palawan-based NGO is also one of the handful of environmental NGOs specializing on legal matters. It is engaged in the prosecution of violators of environmental laws, legal defense of people harassed by these violators of environmental laws and the conduct paralegal training. The participation of NGOs complement government efforts in the conservation of Tubbataha Reefs.
  5. TRNMP was bestowed a distinct honor when UNESCO included it in the list of World Heritage Sites on 11 December 1993.
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### **23. Conservation measures proposed but not yet implemented :**

In 1995, a comprehensive seven-year plan was prepared by the Presidential Task Force on Tubbataha Reefs National Marine Park and by the Protected Area Management Board (PAMB) for Tubbataha. It was based on the Interim Action Plan formulated for the TRNMP in the same year.

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### **24. Current scientific research and facilities:**

Extensive surveys of the Tubbataha Reefs were carried out in 1982 by the Marine Parks Survey Team with researchers from the defunct Natural Resources Management Council (NMRC), Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) and University of the Philippines-Marine Science Institute (UP-MSI). A report with a comprehensive description of ten transect stations and visual observations of the reefs features and inner lagoon habitats was produced (NRMC, 1982). White (1984) studied about five sites on Tubbataha (including Jessie Beazley) in April 1984. In

1995, DENR and a survey team from the Marine Parks Center of Japan made a survey in Tubbataha. In the same year, the Birdlife International in collaboration with DENR, Haribon Foundation, and Dansk Ornitologisk Forening conducted a bird survey of the reefs and formulated a Conservation and Management Strategy for Seabirds in the Sulu Sea.

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**25. Current conservation education :**

A couple of publications on Tubbataha have also been produced in collaboration with NGOs. To cite a few: Tales from Tubbataha: National Heritage, Resources Use and Conservation of Tubbataha Reef. There are also available technical reports written about Tubbataha i.e. Conservation and Management Strategies for Sea Birds in the Sulu Sea; Survey of Seabirds in Tubbataha, Cavili and Cagayancillo, the Sulu Sea, Silliman Journal, Philippine Tubbataha Reef National marine Park: Status, Management Issues and Proposed Plan, etc.. Brochures about the Tubbataha's general information have been produced. These are written in Tagalog and English.

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**26. Current recreation and tourism:**

The coral reefs of Tubbataha have attracted increasing numbers of scuba divers from the Philippines and foreign countries. The visitors come to the area in one or up to several boats which go to the site in April and May. These boats come up with 40 divers and anchor in five or six locations during each trip. The main impact of these boats is anchor damage, dumping of garbage and waste water. There is occasional collecting of shells by over-enthusiastic divers.

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**27. Jurisdiction :**

Jurisdiction over the area is lodged in the DENR, more specifically Region 4, the area being a nationalized entity and part of the RA 7586 otherwise known as the National Integrated Protected Area System (NIPAS) Act of 1992. The Palawan Council for Sustainable Development (PCSD) is consulted regarding the management of the area in view of the Strategic Environmental Plan (RA 7611 dated 19 June 1992) Law for Palawan.

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**28. Management Authority :**

Protected Area Management Board which is chaired by the Regional Executive Director of DENR Region 4.

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## 29. References:

1. Seven (7) years Management Plan, Task Force on TRNMP and PAMB.
2. Manamtam, A. S. 1996. Survey of Seabirds in Tubbataha, Cawili and Cagayancillo for Sulu Sea
3. Manamtam, A. S. 1996. Conservation and Management Strategy for Sea Birds in the Sulu Site, Antonio S. Manamtam, 1996
4. Palaganas, V. P. and R. E. Peres 1993. Observations on the Tubbataha Reef National Marine Park (Philippines), Silliman Journal, 36 (2), p. 5-11
5. Dolar L. L. and A. C. Alcala 1993. Notes on the Ichthyoplankton and Marine Mammals of the Sulu Sea, Philippines. Silliman Journal, 36(2), p. 43-57
6. White, A. T. 1984. Marine parks and reserves: Management for Philippine, Indonesian and Malaysian coastal reef environments. Department of Geography, University of Hawaii, Ph.D. Dissertation, unpublished, 275 pp.
7. Profile of National Parks

Map: see Map (interim) + note in Site file. DB 22.02.2000