

A VISION FOR AN ECOSYSTEM-BASED OCEAN MANAGEMENT OF EAST AND SOUTHEAST ASIAN MARINE ECOREGION

Ambassador Alberto Encomienda

As an archipelagic State, the importance of ocean governance and management to the Philippines cannot be overemphasized especially in terms of sustainable economic development. The Philippines has more water jurisdictions than land territory. Therefore, marine resources will inevitably assume a higher factor for the country's sustainable economic growth in the future. To optimize the benefits derived from its ocean resources, both for the present and for the future, the Philippines must plan and implement an integrated, ecosystem-based ocean management system. Marine issues facing the Philippines include competing land and ocean based development programs, conflicting short, medium and long-term sustainable economic development goals, overlapping institutional mandates, lack of vertical integration of coastal and ocean related programs, underemphasized stakeholder participation, political jurisdictions hindering management of natural marine ecosystems, absence of seamless maritime transit infrastructure, absence of an integrated approach to management, insufficient human resources capability and a shortage of economic development opportunities in coastal areas increases pressure on fisheries, including market failures.

As early as the 1960s the Philippines had embarked on development programs that could be considered precursors to ecosystem based management, albeit more biased toward developmental goals over conservation goals such as the Laguna Lake Development. In 1990s a number of domestic and regional programs were developed which contain aspects of ecosystem-based management of the marine environment, starting with small ecosystems. Among the marine management programs being undertaken in Philippine territorial waters, one that closely approximates an ecosystem-based management model for the marine environment, is the Sulu-Sulawesi Marine Ecoregion Conservation Program Development (SSMECPD) of the World Wildlife Fund. A striking feature of SSMECPD is that the marine area that the project targets do not lie entirely in the maritime territory of the Philippines but encompasses three countries, the Philippines, Indonesia and Malaysia. The initial success of the SSMECPD gives hope for the vision of East and Southeast Asian maritime cooperation that is being advocated in this paper, and highlights the need for ecosystem-based approaches which include stakeholder involvement, the best available scientific information, with integration and communication across political and sectoral boundaries.