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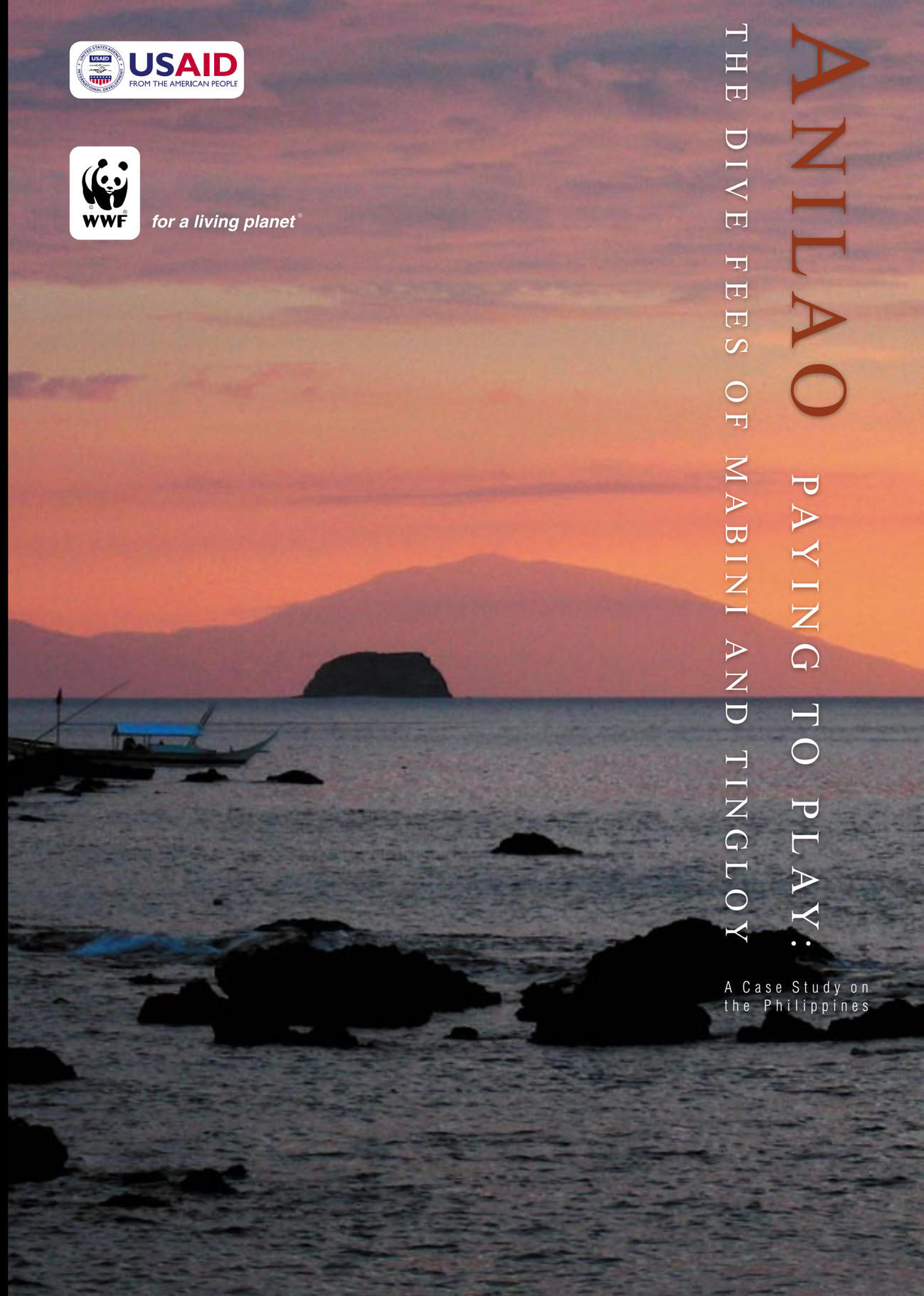
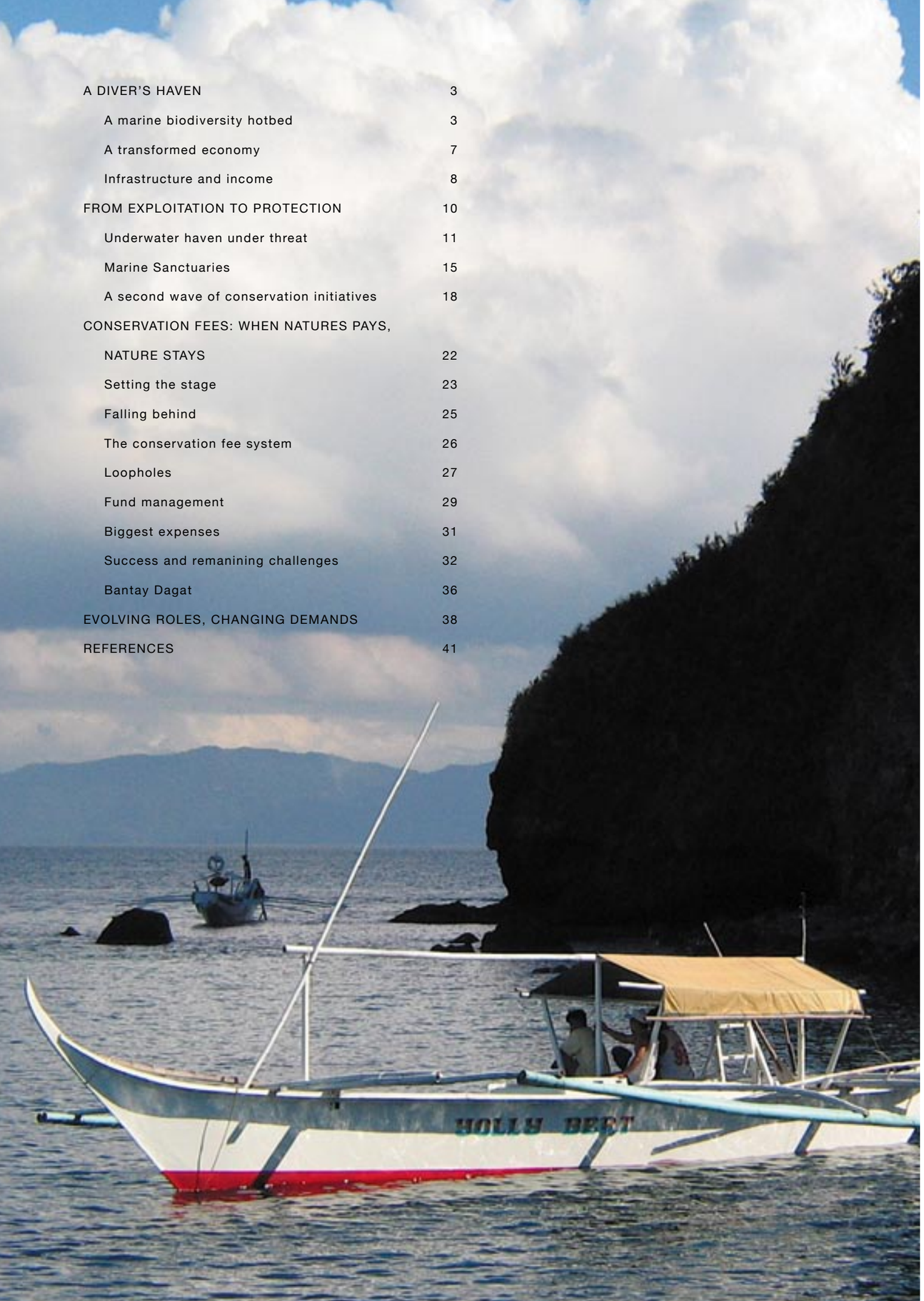
ANILAO PAYING TO PLAY:

THE DIVE FEES OF MABINI AND TINGLOY

A Case Study on the Philippines





ANILAO

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A Case Study on the Philippines

This case study on Anilao is the fourth in a series of analyses being undertaken by WWF-Philippines. This series aims to communicate key issues and lessons from field projects to fellow practitioners, program and policy staff, personnel of managed and/or protected areas, partners, and donors. The first in the series was on the Turtle Islands in Tawi-Tawi, which tackled the issues of entry points for conservation and how resource management ultimately depended on governance. The second case study discussed the establishment and operating systems of the multi-stakeholder environmental law enforcement program of El Nido, Palawan. The third study described how Tubbataha, a pair of offshore reefs 130 kilometers away from the nearest island, became a viable protected area. This fourth case related the establishment of conservation fees paid by scuba-divers in Mabini and Tingloy, Batangas, and the issues and challenges in the face of financial success.

The goal of these case studies is to help create a stronger understanding of the issues, and to promote further learning and sharing of successes and challenges. We welcome feedback on this case study and any others in this series. Please e-mail Joel Palma, Vice-President for Conservation Programmes, WWF-Philippines (jpalma@wwf.org.ph).

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A Divers' Haven

A school of Antiasis fish is a common sight in the coral reef of Beatrice in Tingloy.

It is only 127 kilometers or a 21⁄2-hour drive from Manila, but it may well be one of the most accessible pieces of paradise on the Philippine archipelago. The municipality of Mabini in the province of Batangas is a place of golden sunsets, green hills and valleys, and calm blue waters embraced by a 32-kilometer stretch of rugged coastline. With a land area of 4,296 hectares, Mabini dominates the Calumpan Peninsula, the strip of land dividing Balayan Bay in the west from Batangas Bay in the east. To the north is the town of Bauan, and on the south is Maricaban Strait, across which is the island municipality of Tingloy.

With its proximity to urban centers, Mabini is a popular destination for beach lovers who can come even for the day to a place that seems far away from the noise and congestion of Luzon's urban centers. From July to October, Mabini is hit by rains and occasional typhoons, just like the rest of the country. But for most of the year, and especially during the Philippine summer months of March until May, Mabini draws visitors for a reason that blooms just beneath the smooth surface of the water: it is the nearest prime scuba-diving destination to Manila.

A marine biodiversity hotbed

The area often referred to by outsiders as "Anilao" actually encompasses the municipalities of Bauan and Mabini in the Calumpan Peninsula as well as the island of Tingloy, which sits between the Maricaban and the Mindoro Straits. It is a place of extraordinary marine biodiversity. Recent studies by marine biologists Kent Carpenter and Victor Springer put Anilao in the waters of the Verde Island Passage between the provinces of Batangas and Mindoro, a corridor that has been labeled the "center of the center" of marine shore fish biodiversity because of

Location maps of east Asia, the Philippines and Mabini and Tingloy

the number of species recorded in the area. A 2003 survey by coral taxonomist Douglas Fenner listed a total of 319 species and 74 genera of hard corals—25% more than the average number of corals found in the hotbed known as the Coral Triangle, rich waters shared by the countries of Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines.

In the middle and late 1970s, the underwater attractions of Balayan Bay were discovered by Manila-based scuba-divers, enthusiastic about their new-found sport. Camping was already a popular activity then, with guides leading hikers through yet undeveloped areas to set up campsites. The earliest divers, however, came loaded with a lot more equipment, braving very rough roads with four-wheel-drive vehicles, lugging their own air tanks from Manila, and pitching tents to spend the night near the water, just to be able to dive and spearfish freely in what was then truly an underwater wilderness. "It was really something else then," recalls Roberto "Abet" Napeñas, a former boatman and Batangas-based dive guide for 25 years now, whose father was a close friend of pioneering Anilao resort owner Danny Sarmiento. Sarmiento would establish the Aquaventure Reef Club, one of the first resorts in the peninsula.

In fact, Abet recalls how other divers would leave their cars in a parking lot in the little barangay of Anilao in Mabini, and take boats to the dive sites for a smoother trip. That was how the dive destinations, whether they were in Mabini, Tingloy, or Bauan, became collectively known as Anilao, after the divers' first stop on their

A typical boat ferrying the residents of Tingloy, this is the only means of transport to get to the island municipality.

weekend adventure—despite the fact that Barangay Anilao did not have a single dive site to its name. The name would become even more ironic later, when resorts would rise and better roads would be built in Mabini—when, in fact, the larger part of the diving was to be had in the next municipality. "Mabini had its dive sites along the shoreline," recalls Boy Venus, owner of the resort Club Ocellaris, and one-time president of the Friends of Balayan Bay (FOBB), a first attempt at organizing resort owners in the area. "But most of the dive sites people perceived to be in Mabini were actually in Tingloy."

Roughly three quarters the size of Mabini at 3,241 hectares, Tingloy, named after the thorny local *tinghoy* bush, is sometimes referred to as Mabini's "poorer cousin," as it was part of Mabini until it was declared a separate municipality in 1955. Although fishing, agriculture, mat-weaving, and remittances from overseas workers are the main sources of income here, this one-time refuge for Batangueños fleeing from Spanish oppression in other towns is the only remaining fifth-class municipality in the entire province, while resorts and industries have transformed Mabini into a second-class municipality. Electricity is only available for five hours a day on Tingloy, and the island is accessed through ferries from other municipalities. In 2004, 18,000 people were living in its 15 barangays, 2,000 of them full-time fishermen.

Even if there are only four resorts in Tingloy, it remains a haven for scuba-divers, being home to some 30 favorite dive sites including Mapating, Sepok, Beatrice, Bahura, and Layag-layag. Dolphins and whales have been spotted here, and the sites are overflowing with corals, some of them rare and probably seen nowhere else in the world. Tingloy also covers smaller islands like Sombrero, Bonito, Malajibongmanoc, and Caban, each of them a tourist favorite. Destructive fishing used to be rampant in Tingloy, but has been curbed to a certain degree by the presence of Bantay Dagat patrols. One dive site, Pulangbuli, has been declared the Batalang Bato Marine Sanctuary and is strictly off-

Anilao is a popular site among underwater macro-photographers. Marine species like nudibranchs, mimic octopus, shrimps, ghostpipe fish are among their favorite subjects.

limits to both divers and fishermen. Divers know the site as Pulangbuli because of a red *buri* palm facing it, but Batalang Bato is its local name, and is the name used in the sanctuary ordinance.

Tales of what Anilao diving was like in the early days is the stuff of scuba-diving legend. "There were hammerheads in Beatrice and Mainit, and whale sharks spotted in Kirby's Rock," recalls Abet Napeñas. Elmar Mendoza, another former boatman who began diving in 1985, recalls seeing thresher sharks and giant octopus in Cathedral, one of Anilao's most popular dive sites, as late as the mid-1980s. Dolphins, turtles, mantas, and sharks were commonly sighted, and even whales made an occasional appearance in the distance.

A transformed economy

As more visitors started arriving, whether to dive or simply frolic on the beach, resorts started opening along the coast, especially during the early 1980s. Divers came to indulge in a sport that was growing in popularity. After weeks of Manila-based lessons, the typical check-out dive would involve a ritual of fish-feeding at Cathedral, where a concrete cross sat between two coral mounds at 60 feet. By the end of the 1980s, there were 10 registered resorts in Anilao; by 1994, there were 23. By 2006, there were 73 resorts, more than half of them with diving facilities.

These resorts range from fan-cooled bamboo affairs and inexpensive dive camps, where guests can opt to pitch their own tents on the resort lawn, to more luxurious operations with swimming pools, suites, and spa services. Some resorts offer facilities for other watersports like kayaking, windsurfing, and jet-skiing. Windsurfing in particular has become popular here, with two locals winning gold medals in the last South East Asian Games (SEAG). A regatta held last March 2007 included some 60 participants from different parts of the country.

Resorts count both Filipinos and foreigners among their guests, in different percentages, but all agree that peak season runs through the Philippine summer months of March to June, with an increase in numbers for foreign guests picking up at the onset of winter in the northern hemisphere and international holidays such as Chinese New Year. For the most part, diving in Anilao is a weekend activity for locals, although foreign guests tend to stay through the week. Weekend divers commonly stay for one night, and make four dives.

With the changing face of the landscape due to resort and infrastructure development came a corresponding change in the local economy. As a coastal community with a rich coral reef ecosystem at their doorstep, Anilao was originally a fishing community, where fish was caught as a staple food as well as a means of livelihood and sold to outside markets. There was also some farming in inland communities, with 17% of land area today still planted with coconuts, bananas, and other fruit crops.

By the 1980s, however, rampant use of destructive fishing methods like cyanide, dynamite, and compressor-assisted fishing led to the degradation of the ecosystem. A 2002 study of Mabini by Ateneo de Manila University economics students revealed that fishing was indeed a dying industry, as only six of 34 barangays in Mabini engaged in it. The average catch was 12 kilos of fish per family per day, yielding a paltry income of P3,019 (US$60) a month. Records reveal that even in the early 1990s, fishermen were bringing home as little as two kilos a day.

Infrastructure development and the ensuing pollution also contributed to the decline in fish stock, but the same development offered the locals an

alternative livelihood—employment in the tourism sector. Although the resorts are concentrated in only eight of the 20 coastal barangays in Mabini, a study done in 1994 estimated that the resort industry already employed 10% of the local labor force. Men worked as dive guides and waiters, while women did the housekeeping and cooking for resorts. The Ateneo study revealed that many of these residents found income from the dive tourism industry more dependable than income from fishing, due to the growing uncertainty of the ocean's yield.

The tourism sector in Anilao has evolved over the years into something much more "dynamic," says Eagle Point resort manager Ton Francisco.

The coastline of Mabini facing Balayan Bay is lined with resorts. More than 50% of 70+ resorts in Mabini cater to divers.

Infrastructure and income

The rise of the diving sector has certainly led to many other benefits for its resident community. Infrastructure and utilities have improved in Mabini, with better roads, cellular phone networks, and 24-hour electricity. Because of a greater demand for tourist transport services, particularly boats, one sector that has seen a marked increase in income is the boatmen or *bangkeros*. Former fishermen now make a full-time living from operating dive bancas which charge standard and substantial rates for every diving day. Anilao boatmen have become known for their skillful handling of dive gear, and for their sharp eyes for spotting currents and finding divers who surface a distance from the boat. "Because of maturity and competition, boats are much cleaner and more diver-friendly than before," notes Boy Siojo, a dive instructor and part owner of the resort Balai. "There was a time when they would still use the boat at night for fishing, so the banca would smell. Today they keep it clean, cover the ladders with rubber. If they give good service, they know guests will ask specifically for them again, and regular divers certainly have their favorite *bangkeros*."

"Awareness of scuba-diving increased, particularly after the 1997 Asian financial crisis. Locals couldn't afford to travel abroad anymore, so they concentrated on local tourism." For his part, Dive Solana's Joel Uichico is hoping to see the industry evolve even more, so that Anilao becomes known—and marketed—as a special destination for photographers. "Truk in Micronesia has its wrecks, Mexico has its caves—you can't just market the Philippines as just a general diving destination anymore." In 2006, Uichico, who also heads the Resort Owners Association of Mabini (ROAM), spearheaded a photo competition called "MAD About US," short for the Mabini Annual Digital Underwater Shootout, which attracted both foreign and local underwater photography enthusiasts and pushed Anilao as a world-class macro-photography destination. A successful repeat in 2007 had more participants signing up for the contest.

Torben Bohn bagged the top prize for this photo of a squid in the first MADaboutUS photo contest in 2006. The contest aims to promote Anilao as a world-class underwater macro-photography site.

Locals have also made money selling real estate, which has been prized by both prospective resort owners and out-of-towners building weekend homes. The construction boom has consequently resulted in a demand for construction materials, creating new opportunities for laborers, retailers, and suppliers. The Ateneo study estimated that the income of the then 52 resorts in Mabini exceeded P40 million in 2002.

The main source of income of the people of Mabini today is neither natural resources nor tourism, however. In the words of Romy Banaag, diving operations manager of Aquaventure Reef Club and a trained reef monitoring volunteer of the Coastal Conservation Educational Foundation (CCEF), "There are few people fishing nowadays. They don't want to be fishermen—they'd rather be seamen." Some 45% of the families in Mabini have a member remitting money from abroad as an overseas contract worker, serving as domestic helpers in Italy, entertainers in Japan, or seamen on ships traveling the world. Boy Venus of Club Ocellaris recalls how he recently ran into a former divemaster at his resort, who was in Anilao for a month-long vacation from his job as a seaman. He was driving a brand new car. The Ateneo study revealed that monthly remittances from such overseas workers range from US$150 to US$300 a month.

Thus, while the recreational sector accounted for 34% of the local income in 2003 and fisheries a mere 5%, the money that overseas workers sent home accounted for 38% of the income of the people of Mabini—over P32 million (US$640,000).

From Exploitation To Protection II

Though famous for diving, the municipal waters of Mabini and Tingloy remain the fishing grounds of residents.

As diving became more popular in Anilao in the 1970s, so too did dynamite, cyanide, compressor, and commercial fishing, threatening to nip the diving industry in the bud. Divers are credited with being the first to express concern over the damages wrought by such fishing practices on their playground. Ironically, as the diving industry grew in Anilao over the next three and a half decades, conservation was always a step behind, as it struggled to find a foothold.

Charismatic species such as dolphins are seen occasionally in Anilao.

Underwater haven under threat

Diving and destructive fishing practices—the collection of aquarium fishes using cyanide, dynamite fishing, fishing with the use of compressors, and commercial fishing—developed at about the same time in Anilao in the 1970s. Understandably, the sector most alarmed by this development was the diving industry. “The first advocates for protection of the coral reefs were scuba-divers who began to frequent Mabini and Tingloy dive sites in the mid-1970s,” recalls Alan White, a coastal resources management expert who owns a weekend house in Mabini. Together with the visiting divers, the early resorts “were already concerned about the rampant illegal fishing.”

The Anilao Balayan Resort Owners Association (ABROA) was the first organized group outside of local government that aimed to protect the coastal marine waters of Mabini and Tingloy. Composed mostly of locally-based resort owners, it was established in the mid-1980s. It sought to promote tourism and address illegal and destructive fishing, knowing these would be detrimental to their business. Its members supported the establishment of marine sanctuaries, setting a precedent for close ties between sanctuaries and resorts.

In the mid-1990s, however, ABROA’s leadership kept a low profile after being linked to controversies surrounding a proposed, but later disapproved, flour mill to be built near Aguila Beach Resort in Barangay Anilao. The association suffered from internal problems, and eventually became inactive in the late 1990s, further loosening the reins on illegal and destructive fishing.

Other stakeholders came in to help protect the already threatened coral reefs. In the late 1980s, a non-government organization (NGO), the Haribon Foundation, started a community-

Barrel sponges abound in Mabini and Tingloy (above). Anilao is home to 319 coral species, including this rare Enallopsammia identified by coral taxonomist Douglas Fenner at 90 feet deep in Mabini (below).

based conservation project in Barangays San Teodoro and Bagalangit in Mabini. Working with the local government of Mabini, the group was instrumental in passing several ordinances to combat fisheries abuse between 1990 and 1992. Spearfishing using scuba gear, the use of sodium cyanide, and the gathering, catching, removing, and taking of marine tropical aquarium fishes were prohibited. Unfortunately, these ordinances were hardly enforced, since the corresponding systems and resources were not put in place. The Bantay Dagat (sea patrol) was also established during the period, but their activities were limited by lack of resources and support.

As part of its work, Haribon organized people's organizations (POs) such as the Samahang Pangkaunlaran ng San Teodoro, Inc. (SPSTI) in Barangay San Teodoro, and the Samahan ng Mangingisda para sa Kaunlarang Pangkapaligiran (SMKP) in Barangay Solo. Together with the Center for Empowerment and Resource Development (CERD), the groups lobbied successfully for the establishment of the first-ever marine protected area (MPA) in the province of Batangas in 1991.

Batok dive site near Sombrero Island

Crustaceans like helmet crab and mantis shrimp and colorful aquarium fishes are found in the dive sites of Anilao.

Marine sanctuaries: A brief history of conservation in Anilao

The conservation story of Anilao began with the work of the Haribon Foundation. In 1991, Cathedral, Twin Rocks, Arthur's Rock, and White Sand were declared marine sanctuaries. By the same ordinance, the entire shoreline until 700 meters offshore in Bagalangit and San Teodoro, an area covering the four marine sanctuaries, was declared a municipal marine reserve. Andy Maramot, executive assistant of Mayor Rowell Sandoval of Mabini, was then a member of the Municipal Council and authored the ordinance, and remembers how it took two years to pass. Lope del Prado, barangay captain of San Teodoro, remembers how "bloody" the discussions were—the owner of the land in front of the reefs felt threatened by the idea of limited access, and strongly opposed the ordinance.

Ironically, by the late 1990s, resort owners were clamoring to have the reefs in front of their resorts declared marine sanctuaries, as it bestowed a sense of exclusivity—a position that Dr. Mike Perez, dive instructor and member of the Coastal Resources Management Board (CRMB), defends: "It was the resorts who were becoming more responsible. They may have been protecting their turf to attract more divers, but it was already a big deal to protect your own frontage." In 1993, the ordinance was amended to remove White Sand from the list, as it was mostly just sandy area.

In the 1991 ordinance, fishing was banned in the marine sanctuaries, although hook and line fishing was allowed in the marine reserve. The 1993 amendment included diving among the disallowed activities in the sanctuaries. At the time, formal environmental law enforcement systems had not yet been set up. Patrolling was done by barangay officials and people's organizations, since the marine sanctuaries were visible from shore.

User conflict

While local fishers were driven away from the sanctuaries, diving continued, as well as spearfishing by some divers, which fueled a feeling of discrimination among the local fishers. "Some divers became overzealous, and they could not understand that these people had to live," recalls Balai's Boy Siojo, who was involved in putting up mooring buoys in the early days of conservation efforts in Anilao. "Divers would see fish traps and destroy them, and that resulted in a lot of conflict. In 1999 we were constantly installing mooring buoys, because people were burning them."

Siojo believes it was more the divers' fault, however. "Mali (wrong), because there was no educational component. In any place you go where you have to change somebody's lifestyle, you need community organizers going in. You don't just shove it down their throats." "Manila people fail to recognize that it's a God-given sea," agrees Planet Dive's Joey Fullon. "The waters belong to the people of Batangas by law; you can't tell them what to do."

In 2006, the ordinance was once again amended to officially allow scuba-diving in the marine sanctuaries, which was a case of the law giving in to actual practice, as diving was never really controlled in the sanctuaries. Felix "Ka Owa" Sawali, the municipal councilor who penned the amendment, says that "divers did not know they were not allowed

in the sanctuaries." Lope del Prado has a different view: "Divers could not be stopped from diving in the sanctuaries, because they knew that was where the reefs were beautiful." Research conducted by Silliman University supported both views—that some divers did know diving was prohibited in the sanctuaries but disregarded the law, while others really thought diving was allowed but fishing was not. The amendment took even longer than the original ordinance to pass. "It took three years of debate," recalls Sawali.

The 2006 amendment of the ordinance also provided for the charging of premium fees to dive in the sanctuaries, on top of the conservation fee already being paid by divers. This premium fee is not yet being imposed, but the Marine Reserve Resource Executive Committee (MRREC), a sub-unit of the CRMB created through the 2006 amendment to manage the marine reserve, plans to start collecting within 2007. Andy Maramot, author of the sanctuaries ordinance in 1991, has reservations about "the wisdom of a multiple fee system for the sanctuaries. It will be difficult to implement." He also believes the municipal government "must observe if the sanctuaries indeed remain protected or become damaged under the new system."

Fifteen years after Mabini's marine reserve and sanctuaries were declared, the most striking change is the common perception that the tension between fishers and the tourism sector is decreasing. Al Licuanan, a marine biologist from De La Salle University in Manila who led the baseline studies of the area for WWF, describes the tension as "overrated," since local fishermen use hook and line fishing, which is not directly related to coral destruction and is allowed in the marine reserve, if not in the sanctuaries.

A dying industry

Riki Sandalo, project manager of WWF-Philippines, estimates that of Mabini's population of 37,000, less than a thousand still engage in fishing. Although workshops and consultations were held, in the end, the tension between the fishing and tourism sectors was resolved not by negotiations, but by economics. Emple Isla and Zoilo Casa, top officials of the boat operators' association, shifted from fishing to tourism 15 and 10 years ago respectively. "Fishing was difficult," both men say. "We stopped fishing because we earn more from the dive boat," "Tourism has been the best alternative for the economy," agrees Planet Dive's Joey Fullon. "Locals find that, one way or another, their neighbors and relatives make money from the tourism that comes in. But the idea of sustainability has yet to be internalized."

This tension between stakeholders in Anilao has been a popular topic of scientific studies. A study published in 2005 upholds the age-old issue that the marine sanctuaries benefit divers more than fishers. However, a 2007 study introduced a new twist: while they support the idea of easing tensions between them and divers, fishers now feel more marginalized by conservation than by tourism. Whether fishers in Mabini are being forced by circumstances or voluntarily shifting to tourism for better income, the fact is that this opportunity is less available to the fishers of Tingloy. For them, the center of the action of the recreation sector lies on the other side of Maricaban Strait.

The question now is whether Tingloy's sanctuary, Batalang Bato, will suffer the same fate as those in Mabini. Batalang Bato was established in 2002 with assistance from the CCEF. The difference is that Batalang Bato has been effectively closed to diving since it was declared a sanctuary, while the marine sanctuaries of Mabini remain open to divers. Another difference is that fishing remains a dominant source of livelihood for the people of Tingloy.

The Batalang Bato Management Council (BBMC) has petitioned the Municipal Council of Tingloy to open the sanctuary to diving for extra fees, an action which Rowena Manalo, BBMC secretary, feels ambivalent about. Prior to their request, Manalo says, the municipal government had pretty much left them on their own. After the request, they were informed that they needed to hold an election, and she is sensing pressure to elect a staff member of the local government as BBMC chairperson. "I am worried we will be politicized," says Manalo—a sentiment apparently shared by many working in the coastal management system of Tingloy. Whether or not that will happen will ultimately depend on the determination of the local government and the fishing community to properly manage their coastal resources.

Accessibility from Manila and good visibility of its waters draw divers to Anilao.

More and more fishermen in Mabini shift to tourism because of assured income. This option is not as accessible to the fishermen of Tingloy.

A second wave of conservation initiatives

After the Haribon project ended, the mid-1990s saw the ebbing of conservation initiatives in Anilao. The year 1998 marked the second wave of such efforts.

The 1998 elections ushered in new leadership in both towns. Mayor Rowell Sandoval of Mabini was a municipal councilor before he ran for mayor in 1998, and took part in the passage of conservation-related ordinances in the early 1990s.

Mayor Antonio Atienza was also elected as the new, young mayor of Tingloy. Under his leadership, Tingloy caught up with Mabini on the municipal ordinances pertaining to coastal resource management. The extraction of sand and gravel along sensitive coasts, waste disposal in water areas, the collection of aquarium fishes and sabalo or mother bangus, and cyanide, dynamite, and compressor fishing—all were prohibited within the first two years of his term. Later on, Tingloy also prohibited spearfishing with the use of scuba equipment. These legislations provided a good policy platform for the community's environmental law enforcement crusade. The ordinances were mostly sponsored by Councilor Merding de Guzman, head of Tingloy's Bantay Dagat team.

It was also in 1998 that WWF-Philippines started working in Mabini and Tingloy. In a way, the conservation organization's entry into the area was unintentional. Romy Trono, then a member of WWF-Philippines' senior management, brought Wolcott Henry, a member of the board of WWF-United States, on a diving trip to Anilao. Henry was so moved by both the diving experience and associated problems that a decade later, he was awarded the first ever lifetime dive pass in honor of his being the biggest and most consistent individual donor to conservation projects in Anilao. WWF's early projects in the area focused on marine environmental law enforcement.

Coincidentally, the new Philippine Fisheries Code (RA 8550) was also passed in 1998. As provided for by the Code, the Municipal Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Management Council (MFARMC) of Mabini was established in 2001, while that of Tingloy was organized a year later. To further strengthen the Code, Mabini adopted an ordinance that strongly prohibited commercial fishing and all forms of destructive fishing within a 15-kilometer range of its municipal waters in 2003. Tingloy followed suit the same year.

By 1998, it was becoming obvious that there was a need for closer coordination between Mabini and Tingloy, considering the setup of Anilao's diving industry. A sisterhood agreement between the two towns was formalized to coordinate and jointly manage their shared marine resources, paving the way for the Mabini-Tingloy Coastal Area Development Council (MATINGCADC). Through the local government, this body recruited volunteers for Bantay Dagat. Upon recruitment, WWF provided training and logistical support. The revived Bantay Dagat of the two towns started patrolling municipal waters in mid-2000. Unfortunately, before MATINGCADC could truly reactivate the Bantay Dagat, it was beset by partisan politics. The local elections of 2001 led to the organization's natural death.

The business sector jumped on the bandwagon of renewed conservation efforts as well. In 2000, more than a decade after the now-defunct Anilao Balayan Resort Owners Association (ABROA) was organized, the Friends of Balayan Bay (FoBB) was established, this time composed mostly of Manila-

A view from the hills of San Teodoro, Mabini, overlooking Maricaban Strait which separates Mabini and the island of Tingloy (above). Flutemouth fish (below).

Tubastrea coral in full bloom looks even more attractive at night. They are commonly seen in the marine sanctuaries of Cathedral Rock and Twin Rocks in Mabini (above). The camouflage of this shrimp fails to shield it from the sharp eyes of a macro-photographer (below).Three-spot angelfish are found even in shallow waters (right).

based owners of resorts in Mabini. They advocated for more vigorous coastal resource management in the area. They also initiated the annual International Coastal Cleanup every third Saturday of September, mobilizing divers from Metro Manila to join in. This annual event became a popular environmental awareness tool and was eventually adopted and led by the municipal governments of Mabini and Tingloy. The activity has expanded to include the cleanup of shorelines and inland areas. Starting in 2004, the coastal cleanup was also adopted by the provincial government of Batangas, and has become a province-wide annual event.

FoBB eventually became inactive as an organization, and in its place was formed the Resort Owners Association of Mabini (ROAM), with

its broader membership of both local and Manila-based resort owners. Boy Venus, former head of the FoBB, believes that the new organization has a greater advantage when it comes to resources and representation, because members have more common issues now. “In the beginning, when we held FoBB meetings and invited all the resort owners, everyone had their own ideas, and we were a bit overwhelmed,” he says. “Owners of the non-diving resorts think rather differently, and they were less concerned about the environmental aspect. When we’d bring up the environment and garbage, they wanted to talk about building roads.”

In 2003, the dive boat owners and operators servicing the diver-tourists formed the Aroma Dive Boat Association (ADBA). The dive boat owners and operators were mostly former fishermen who had shifted their livelihoods to tourism.

The latest major player in Anilao is Conservation International (CI), another non-government organization that entered the area in 2003. Its aim, over its 10-year program, is to establish a network of marine protected areas to effectively manage the length of the Verde Passage. It seeks to establish partnerships and the active engagement of the business sector in conservation work.

Three decades after concern for the marine environment was first expressed, Anilao is on its way to an environmental rebound. Fishery problems in Mabini are now limited to occasional violations of scuba-assisted spearfishing. The bigger problem now is the encroachment of commercial fishers from the neighboring towns of Bauan, Lemery, and Batangas City, even though there are still reports of local fishers in Tingloy committing violations. But on the upside, with the establishment of the community’s environmental law enforcement system, stakeholders note that fish catch and coral reefs have improved in both towns. Charismatic species like marine turtles, dolphins, rays, pygmy sperm whales, and even whale sharks have been reportedly sighted, and with increasing frequency. The challenge lies in sustaining these initial signs of success for the long run.

Conservation Fees: When Nature Pays, Nature Stays III

Table corals are abundant in dive sites around Sombrero Island.

The conservation fee system of Anilao is anchored on the tourist activity it is famous for – scuba-diving. Anilao had been a dive destination for two decades before the fee system was established. As could be expected, it met considerable resistance at first. "I was against the fact that they wanted to collect fees only from scuba divers," says Dr. Mike Perez, admittedly one of the dive fee's most vocal critics in the beginning.

The two municipal governments of Mabini and Tingloy were able to establish a system, although, in Mayor Rowell Sandoval's words, "You only see room for improvement as you go along." The biggest political success here is that the two municipal governments have been able to integrate their collection system. Most importantly, the general sentiment seems to be that the fee system benefits all concerned. Even divers, who pay the fee, have noted a direct benefit: "It's good that we pay, because we can expect services." The system is far from perfect, however, and the loopholes need to be addressed in order to minimize the threats that could undermine the system.

Setting the stage

By the year 2000, Anilao had seen a decade of conservation projects. Implemented by various NGOs and divers' groups, these projects had come and gone in periods ranging from six months to three years. Because of this periodic nature of projects, conservation efforts also came in spurts. Although one NGO, WWF, dominated the conservation scene in Anilao at the time, the relatively small funding for projects resulted in activities that, upon hindsight, were not properly programmed, such as various short-term research studies, the organizing of the Bantay Dagat with sporadic support for operations, and attempts to integrate coastal resource management among the municipalities around Balayan Bay.

The attention of the municipal governments of Mabini and Tingloy were on other matters. They had neither the funds nor the inclination to devote municipal resources to coastal management. Mabini was not earning very much from tourism, other than from property and business taxes collected from the resorts along its western coast. Tingloy was not earning anything from tourism at all, despite the fact that the majority of dive sites in the area were in its municipal waters.

It was under these circumstances that the idea of a dive fee was conceived, to make conservation pay for itself. WWF-Philippines conducted a willingness-to-pay survey in 2000, interviewing more than 230 divers. An overwhelming majority—97% of Filipinos and 86% of foreigners—indicated that they were "willing to pay a per-visit surcharge... to maintain the state of coral reefs at Mabini-Tingloy." The study recommended the amount of PhP400 (US$8) to be collected per diver for a weekend of diving.

The profiles of the interviewees revealed that divers visited Anilao an average of once a month, and made four dives per visit. Less than 5% were first-time divers. When asked why they came to

The conservation fee was launched in November 2003 after a series of consultations, workshops and massive information campaign to gain the support of divers, resort owners and other sectors .

Anilao repeatedly, the reasons included proximity to Manila, the general condition of coral reefs, and the diversity of underwater wildlife. Based on the estimated occupancy rates of the resorts, it was projected that a conservation fee system could potentially earn for the municipalities more than PhP9 million (US$180,000) annually.

WWF presented the results of the study to the local governments of Mabini and Tingloy in September 2001. With their interest piqued, and perceiving the need for further information, the local government of Mabini funded its own study tour to Apo Island in Negros Oriental to learn from their experiences with their protected area. Mayor Rowell Sandoval admits that "Apo Island was our guide" in establishing Mabini's fees, and they selected elements they liked and dispensed with those they did not, such as being under the National Integrated Protected Areas System (NIPAS), under the jurisdiction of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR).

Municipal Councilor Felix "Ka Owa" Sawali sponsored the dive fee ordinance. The Municipal Council conducted consultations and information campaigns on the ordinance, as required by law. On August 2002, they consulted the stakeholders who would become the direct payers of the fee: divers, most of them based in Manila. It was during this fateful meeting that the divers agreed to pay PhP50 (US$1) per day of diving, with the option of purchasing an annual dive pass at PhP1,000 (US$20). The ordinance was passed in February 2003; collections started in September 2003. In the period between the passing of the ordinance and the start of collection, massive information campaigns were conducted by the local government and the NGOs in response to questions, issues, and resistance coming from the diving community.

Falling behind

Although WWF's intention was to establish the conservation fee system concurrently on both Mabini and Tingloy, the latter fell behind in drafting the ordinance. Luzviminda Villas, the Municipal Environmental and Natural Resources Officer (MENRO) of Mabini, clearly remembers, "Our agreement was to make our respective drafts of the ordinance. However, after the public consultation on May 1, 2002, work on Tingloy's ordinance ceased." Mistrust between the two municipalities' officials caused the breakdown of the planned unified fee collection. Political alliances hindered the progress of Tingloy's conservation fee ordinance even further. A member of the municipal council of Tingloy purportedly blocked the ordinance, and MENRO Villas remembers that the same councilor of Tingloy criticized Mabini's ordinance. When Mabini started collecting conservation fees and its financial resources started to grow, however, the pressure on Tingloy to come up with its ordinance proved too great for politicking. Tingloy's own ordinance on the conservation fee system was finally passed in the last quarter of 2003.

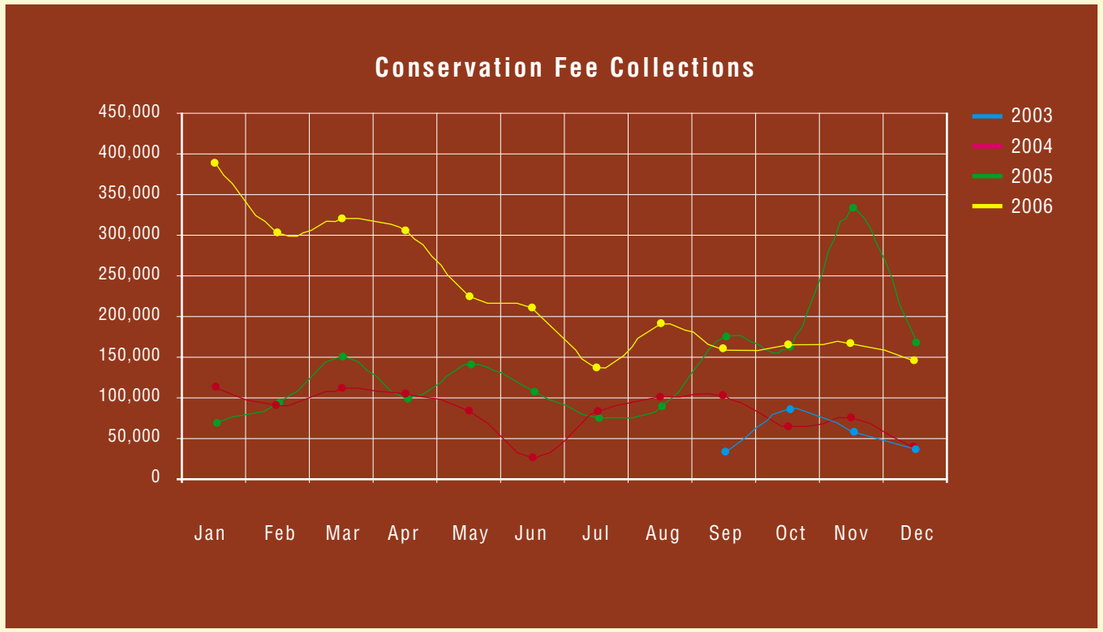
Upon approval, however, Tingloy's ordinance once again found itself at a standstill. Since all the resorts and dive shops were in Mabini, there was no means of collecting the fees from the divers, even as they flocked to the reefs in Tingloy's municipal waters.

The only logical solution was to integrate the fees of both municipalities—that is, Mabini would also collect fees on behalf of Tingloy. When it became obvious that intense negotiations were required to work out the details of the unification, the Coastal Resource Management Boards of both Mabini and Tingloy assigned two members each to the task. Although the unification of the fees had been agreed upon in principle, the bone of contention was the sharing of the collected fees. When negotiations were deadlocked, Mayor Sandoval eventually intervened and declared that the two municipalities would split the fees 50-50 after administrative expenses had been deducted.

This agreement was reached during the WWF-sponsored study tour in Gilutongan, Cebu on April 2005. The Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) was signed in June, and implementation finally started two years after Tingloy passed its ordinance, in September 2005. The unified fee is PhP100 (US$2) per day of diving or PhP1,800 (US$36) for an annual pass, allowing access to any of the dive sites of both municipalities.

Left to right: Mayors Rowell Sandoval of Mabini, Arleigh Sitoy of Cordova and Antonio Atienza of Tingloy during the study tour in Gilutongan Marine Sanctuary conducted in April 2005. The trip was instrumental in unifying the dive fee system between Mabini and Tingloy.

Figure 1: Anilao conservation fee collections, 2003 to 2006



The conservation fee system

Conservation fee collections from September 2003 to December 2006 amounted to a total of PhP5,628,130 (US$112,563). As seen in Figure 1, an annual trend has not yet been established. The dramatic increase in figures in the last quarter of 2005, which seemingly runs contrary to popular knowledge that the Philippine summer months of April and May are peak diving season, is attributed to the doubling of the amount upon unification of the fees of the two municipalities. Other observations are that more divers come during long weekends, and significantly fewer divers arrive when there are typhoons.

Daily and annual dive passes can be purchased from dive resorts, the Municipal Environmental and Natural Resources Office and Municipal Tourism Office of Mabini, and the WWF office in Barangay Anilao East.

The dive passes are prepaid by the resorts and sold to their customers at the same price. As recommended by the willingness-to-pay survey, the conservation fee is included in the resort's billing statement to simplify the collection system. Upon boarding, the boat operator inspects the ticket and detaches a portion of the ticket. It is then the duty of the Bantay Dagat to conduct random ticket inspections at sea.

Resource management planning and consultation workshops have been conducted in both municipalities.

The collection mechanism is based on a system of incentives and disincentives. On the part of the resort owners, the penalty for letting their guests dive without a dive pass is the confiscation of air tanks, which can be redeemed upon payment of the PhP2,000 (US$40) penalty. Regular divers usually have their own gear, with the exception of air tanks, which they rent from the resort. According to Restituto Dalisay, Mabini's municipal agricultural officer, ROAM head Joel Uichico is advocating the confiscation of other gear to discourage divers from dodging the fee, as well. As it is, the confiscation of the air tank is a disincentive for the resort owner, but not for the diver who is caught without a pass. Unfortunately, there is also no incentive for the resorts to comply with the ordinance, even if just to compensate their staff for the additional work of collecting the fee.

For the boat operator, there is both an incentive and a disincentive. Each ticket stub detached from a dive pass is redeemable for PhP10 (US$0.20) from the fund holder, the Municipal Environmental and Natural Resources Office of the local government. If a boat operator is caught ferrying divers without passes, he is charged a penalty of PhP1,000 (US$20) and faces a suspension of his license for 15 days.

Loopholes

However, there are loopholes in the system. Foremost in their experience is the alleged reusing of tickets. The resort or office issuing the daily pass should indicate the date of use. Without the date, "there is no limit to how many times a pass can be used," according to MENRO Villas, who is aware of one resort with such a case. The resort owners were given a warning, but popular belief indicates that the anomaly still occurs. Boat operators point their fingers at the resort staff; others say that it can only happen when there is connivance between resort staff and boat operators, because without the boat operator's stub, the resort staff could not reuse the same ticket.

Unfortunately, the intended check and balance system between resorts and boat operators through the latter's PhP10 stub is where the second loophole lies. According to Zoilo Casa, chairperson of the Aroma Dive Boat Association (ADBA), only ADBA members are authorized to collect the PhP10 from the municipal government. He says there are more than a hundred dive boat operators, only 48 of whom are members of ADBA.

Divers prepare to take the plunge.

Members of the Mabini CRMB and Sangguniang Bayan after one of their meetings to amend the ordinance on the marine reserve (above). A unified dive pass, amounting to PhP100 for a day of diving, is usually incorporated in the diver's resort bill to simplify collection. Annual dive passes are also available (below).

Therefore, for the non-members of ADBA, the PhP10 incentive does not exist.

When asked why only their members are authorized to collect the boat operator's share, Simplicio "Emple" Isla, president of ADBA, believes that the municipal government wants all dive boat operators to become members of ADBA to simplify their transactions. However, not all boat operators want to become members of ADBA, so this loophole is unlikely to be addressed in the near future.

Isla further relates that some resorts, particularly those owned by Koreans, have their own dive boats, and therefore do not require the services of independent boat operators. He had an experience with a Korean-owned resort that contracted his services. Upon inspection of the divers' tickets, he saw that the date was not indicated. He asked the resort to do so, and though there is no way of confirming whether this was indeed the reason, the resort never availed of his services again. Both Casa and Isla are quick to point out that not all Koreans or Korean resort owners have this attitude, however.

The third loophole is in the monitoring system. The primary task of Bantay Dagat members is to guard the municipal waters against illegal and destructive fishing. Inspection of dive passes is merely a secondary duty, if at all, because they also perform rescue operations of both divers and marine wildlife. Because of the nature of their work, they can hardly be expected to inspect all dive boats.

Hence, there are gaps in the monitoring system, which leads to the system's fourth weakness, the lack of basis for assessing compliance. Access to Mabini is very easy, with no single point of entry such as a pier or airport where visitor arrivals can be monitored. Divers merely drive to the resorts, and even divers staying in Puerto Galera in Mindoro make it as far as Tingloy's municipal waters to dive. This makes it difficult for the local governments of Mabini and Tingloy to determine just how many divers they host in any given period. Resort owners are often circumspect about revealing information about their occupancy rates. Therefore, the available figures on guest arrivals are only estimates, and could not serve as guides in determining the rate of compliance with the conservation fee ordinance.

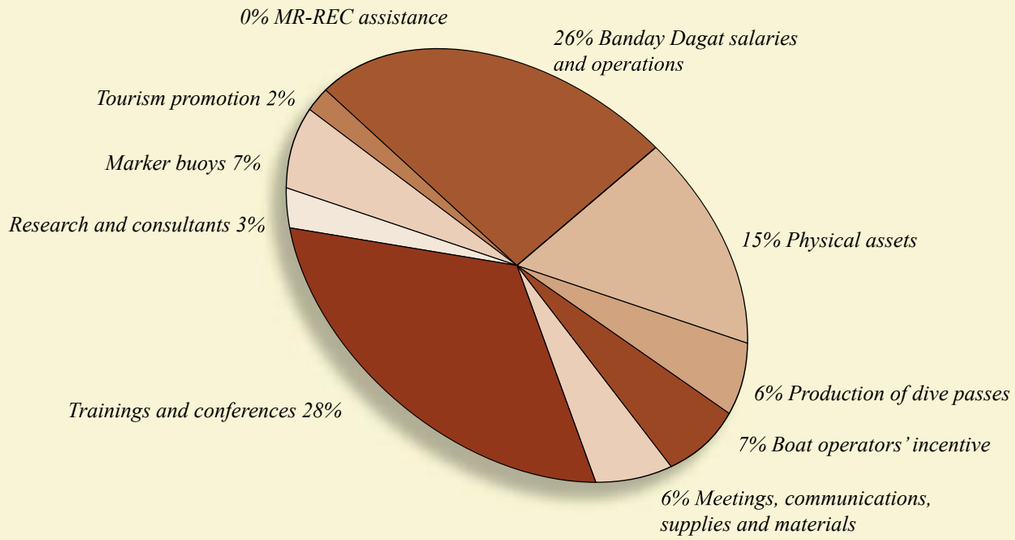
Even a resort's size could not be a determining factor to assess compliance. A quick look at the collection figures indicates that the Aquaventure Resort has consistently contributed about 50% of collections, although it is not the biggest resort. Eagle Point is the biggest resort but, according to WWF's Riki Sandalo, not all of its guests are divers. The rate of compliance is therefore anybody's guess.

Fund management

Corollary to the establishment of the conservation fee was the creation of its managing body, the Coastal Resources Management Board (CRMB). Each municipality has its own CRMB, whose function is much wider than just fund management, encompassing planning, implementation, monitoring, and policy formulation in relation to the municipalities' coastal resources. For purposes of this case study, however, discussions on the CRMBs will be limited to the management of the conservation fees, as it is the primary source of funding for the management body's activities.

The CRMB of Mabini has 11 members, while Tingloy's has nine. In both municipalities, the mayor acts as chairperson, and the vice-chair is the chairperson of the Committee on Environment of the Municipal Council. The members are representatives of other offices of the local government, the diving

Figure 2: Mabini's allocation of expenses from conservation fee special account for 2006.



Volunteers from Mabini and Tingloy as they prepare to install buoys on dive sites in Tingloy. Divers demand better and more visible buoys in exchange for paying the conservation fee. In Mabini, a local dive boat operators' association was commissioned to install and manage buoys in 20 dive sites.

community, resort owners, boat operators, the academe, and NGOs. Both CRMBs are required to meet at least once every two months, and both municipalities admit to the difficulty of finding a common time among members, so this provision is not always complied with.

Their respective ordinances state that 85% of Mabini's collected fees will go to a special account, while 15% goes to Mabini's general fund; for Tingloy, 80% goes to the special account and 20% to the general fund. Beyond these stipulations, it is up to the CRMB to manage the special account, subject to approval by the Municipal Council.

Although Mabini started collecting conservation fees as early as September 2003, funds were not disbursed until almost a year later, in August 2004. The problem was that they started collecting fees without a concrete plan for how to spend it. Tingloy suffered the same problem. This was precisely the argument of divers when the plan to collect dive fees was presented to them in 2002—that the municipality did not even have a CRM Plan yet—so they were questioning how the funds would be used.

Al Licuanan, former member of the CRMB of Mabini as representative of the academe, recalls that, as funds in the special account exceeded the PhP1 million (US$20,000) mark and continued to grow, "discussions on how to spend it were already getting vicious." Understandably, each member of the CRMB wanted to use the funds according to his own interests. For example, the Bantay Dagat wanted to use it for their patrol operations. Resort owners, on the other hand, wanted to hire private security to do the patrolling for better accountability. Licuanan recalls that the local government somewhat took a back seat in the heated debates, although it has constantly suffered from what he calls a "clamor for edifice," and was therefore always looking at physical investments, such as patrol boats.

The trouble with having put the cart before the horse, Licuanan says, was, "How can you be objective about the process if the money was already there? You cannot distinguish anymore between those who cared and those who were there for the money." It took many meetings before the CRMB finally agreed on an expense plan.

Biggest expenses

By far the biggest expense for both municipalities is the remuneration and operations of the Bantay Dagat. In fact, for Tingloy, this is just about their only expense category, other than administrative items. Comparisons between Mabini and Tingloy often irritate the people of Tingloy. Teodora Mendoza, who acts as both the agricultural officer and environmental and natural resources officer of Tingloy, complains that the comparison is unfair. "Mabini is rich, so they have more resources for other allocations. Here, everything goes to the Bantay Dagat." Being a member of the CRMB of Tingloy, she senses pressure from Mabini to spend the money the way they do.

Mabini's other regular expense is the PhP10,000 (US$200) it pays monthly to the ADBA for maintaining 20 mooring buoys at the dive sites. Their duties include taking the buoys out and reinstalling them during typhoons. Emple Isla almost sheepishly admits that only four ADBA members are actually active in maintaining the buoys, even though they have many members and all payments go to their association's account. Special projects funded by Mabini's conservation

fee collections include the development of the Coastal Resources Management Plan and plans for solid waste management and water use zones.

Despite the initial difficulty in putting together its expense plan, Johnny Beloso, a member of the Bantay Dagat and a pioneer of coastal conservation in the area, says Mabini's fund management is very transparent. Members of the private sector, however, express strong reservations about the way Mabini's funds are being managed. "People may still be concerned that they are not very transparent about what they do with the money," says Boy Venus. "For example, they say they collected P1.7 million one year—then spent P600,000 on a boat. My own boat costs only about P120,000. And then, they allocate only P50,000 for fuel for the entire year—it was a joke!" Some question the wisdom of fund allocation, while others, merely the disbursement system.

And although Tingloy's constituency does not welcome comparisons with Mabini, the allegations on their improper fund management are more serious, including the claim that they have no transparency at all. Rey Manalo, chairperson of their Bantay Dagat, laments that even the budget allocation of their conservation fee collections is politically motivated. "Politicking is very strong here," he says, recalling the delay they experienced in developing the fee system.

Successes and the remaining challenges

The most obvious indicator of success of Anilao's conservation fee is the funds raised for its coastal resource management activities. "The dive fee is good because everyone benefits from it," says Zoilo Casa, chairperson of the boat operators' association. When asked if he thinks they are able to collect enough, Johnny Beloso of Bantay Dagat says, "It seems enough; the municipal government is even building a new boat from its proceeds." Mayor Rowell Sandoval of Mabini disagrees. "We need to collect more in order to expand our program." His priorities include education and awareness-raising among coastal communities, and he would like to see the municipality hire all members of the Bantay Dagat as full-time employees.

Beyond financial gain, however, the bigger success of the conservation fee is seen in the Coastal Resources Management Board. The CRMB is the unifying factor that has brought together the local government, NGOs, and resorts. This is a far cry from the earlier situation in Anilao, when institutions and organizations would implement their own projects with absolutely no involvement of other stakeholders. Furthermore, the CRMB is a local organization that built itself from the myriad of other small local organizations; it has so far remained free from the dictates of the national government or other top-down interventions. "The CRMB is a big step because it enabled the creation of systems," says Raoul Cola, a WWF consultant.

Andy Maramot, Mayor Sandoval's executive assistant and one of the pioneering conservationists in Mabini, claims to know the secret: "Working together was the key to success." It is a sentiment echoed by resort owners, as expressed by Aquaventure's Romy Banaag: "It all boils down to people helping each other. Before, the community didn't know how to protect the environment. Any changes in how things will be run must come from the barangay officials."

Despite the successes, no one thinks even for a second that conservation work is over in Anilao.

A big challenge for the local government is to translate its income from conservation fees by investing in coastal resource management that would produce tangible benefits for the local fishermen.

On the contrary, the list of challenges they face is rather daunting.

- Physical and environmental problems - These are among the first to come to mind for the stakeholders of Mabini and Tingloy. These include pollution, soil erosion, siltation, and disregard of shoreline setback, as resorts are constructed right on, or even beyond, the waterline.
- Scaling up - Jacinto Bulaclac, municipal administrator of Mabini, remembers an earlier attempt to integrate CRM activities among the 11 coastal municipalities along Balayan Bay. An Integrated Coastal Management (ICM) plan was developed, but the attempt to integrate did not prosper, and Bulaclac deems it "premature, and therefore not sustained." Internal politics within and among the municipalities, as well as different interests—e.g. commercial fishers from Batangas City, Bauan, Calatagan, and Lemery—are a hurdle. However, issues such as pollution coming from Batangas Bay clearly indicate the need to scale up CRM efforts. On the upside, the provincial government has plans of pursuing the integration, but it is a cause for concern that their plans are focusing on the conservation fee model. "The dive fee in Anilao is a very significant part of the sustainable financing component of the provincial ICM Plan, especially now that the Bantay Dagat of many municipalities need logistical and financial support," says Evelyn Estigoy, Provincial Government Environment and Natural Resources Officer. "We look forward to replicating the Mabini-Tingloy model in other towns like Calatagan, Lobo, and San Juan."
- The aftermath of the May 2007 elections - A question that kept recurring during interviews for this case study was, "What will happen after the elections?" Having served three terms since they were elected in 1998, as of this writing, both the mayors of Mabini and Tingloy are in their last terms of office. Both towns will therefore have new leaders by the middle of 2007. Jacinto Bulaclac expresses his trepidation: "What if this CRM in general, and conservation fee in particular, is not the interest of the next mayor? This has been eight to nine years in the making." Andy Maramot is more optimistic: "It will be self-defeating for the new administration not to support it, because people who depend on the diving industry for a living number in the thousands. If the new mayor does not support the program, he will not be reelected."
- Lack of data - The lack of information on visitor arrival has already been cited as a problem, because it hinders the accurate assessment of compliance with the conservation fee ordinance. Although people believe that the resort owners' initial fear that the conservation fee would drive away divers was ultimately unfounded, this could not be officially confirmed due to lack of data. Some believe tourist arrivals have remained the same, while others believe they are even growing as diving becomes more popular. "And besides," says Lope del Prado, "divers say the fees are nothing new, because it is already practiced in other areas they have been to."
  There is also a widespread impression that the coastal resources of Mabini have been improving since 1998. WWF and Earthwatch Institute studies indicate that coral cover and fish diversity are improving in the waters of Anilao. However, Al Licuanan expresses reservations about the direct attribution of the increased fish catch to reef protection, because 95% of the fisheries of Mabini is pelagic. Mabini's fisheries have displayed peaks in fish catch that have remained largely unexplained, Licuanan says, with one such peak in 1994—a period when marine environmental laws were not being strictly enforced.
- Lack of plans - While enthusiasm is an invaluable asset, it is not good when it gets in the way of careful planning. The marine sanctuaries of the early 1990s, the enforcement projects of the late 1990s, and once again, the collection of a conservation fee—all of these entailed doubling back to catch up with steps already taken by setting up systems or developing plans necessary to operate them smoothly. Doubling back requires more resources, and as seen in the heated negotiations over the expense plan, can be emotionally draining and detrimental to institutional relations. These might have been growing pains, but it will be to everyone's advantage if the stakeholders of Mabini and Tingloy learn from their previous experiences.
- Transparency and accountability - Public perception of the handling of the conservation fee could spell the difference between its continuation and its breakdown. The private sector, both the resorts and the NGOs, could withdraw support if they think the funds are not being managed or spent well. Divers will only be willing to pay if they believe they are getting their money's worth in terms of where their money goes. In fact, if the coral reefs of Anilao deteriorate to a great extent, its entire diving industry will be jeopardized.

Threats to the quality of marine life in Anilao include the lack of waste management and the large vessels that ply this route. Oil depots in neighboring Batangas Bay and their cargo vessels inherently carry the risk of oil spills.

Bantay Dagat:
When NGO assistance no longer works

Despite receiving a lion's share of the fund allocation, or perhaps because of it, the Bantay Dagat of Mabini and Tingloy are fraught with issues. Mabini's Bantay Dagat has seven regular members who receive a monthly stipend. Another 15 members are non-regular, receiving remuneration only for each patrol operation they join. Tingloy has 21 Bantay Dagat members, all of whom would be considered "non-regular" based on the definition used in Mabini. This scenario has not always been the case.

There was a time when the Bantay Dagat members' stipend was being supplied by NGOs, first by WWF, then by Conservation International (CI). According to the Bantay Dagat members, their stipends were bigger then, because they went out on patrols more frequently. The drawback of being on the payroll of NGOs, however, is that they were hired on a per-project basis, and there would be gaps in their employment, as one project ended and the next one had yet to begin.

This sporadic employment and operations of the Bantay Dagat was one of the problems targeted for solution by the conservation fee. With the advent of the conservation fee, they are assured of sustained employment, a fact that is not lost on Johnny Beloso, a Bantay Dagat "regular" of Mabini. Aside from being assured of regular source of funds, Beloso says the biggest advantage of working for the government is that there is "less hassle after apprehension. If we conduct patrols due to a reported sighting, a member of the police accompanies us and handles the processing of the case."

However, since the conservation fee is still fairly young, having been implemented only for the last three years, the result is that majority of Bantay Dagat members actually receive less compensation. It was no surprise then when a member of Mabini's local government commented that Bantay Dagat members seem to be losing enthusiasm for their work. "This is a common problem," says Raoul Cola. "The institutional mechanism, through the LGU, should have been prepared first before taking over the supervision of the Bantay Dagat. Transition issues should be expected."

As it turned out, the stipend issue was only the tip of the iceberg. Other reasons were cited. They did not receive their remuneration right away, as they now follow the government's disbursement process. Their personal expenses, such as transportation expenses from their homes and food provisions, used to be shouldered by the NGOs, whereas the government does not operate that way. Also, there are lots of "extra jobs" which they feel they cannot refuse, since they are now employed by the municipality. They also have the perception that NGOs had a greater sense of urgency when it came to the work, so their requests were acted upon immediately.

True enough, when WWF conducted a participatory assessment in April and May 2005, among the problems identified regarding the conservation fee were the slow disbursement of funds and the ambiguous delineation of functions among local government officers.

Lope del Prado, barangay captain of San Teodoro, defends the slow fund disbursement. He agrees that the approval process takes a while, but "it is only proper, to protect the fund."

The delineation of functions among the government offices is another matter. When the conservation fee was established, supervision of the Bantay Dagat was assigned to the Municipal Environmental and Natural Resources Office, but it soon became apparent that the arrangement was not working. In Feb 2006, the Bantay Dagat was transferred to the Municipal Agriculturist Office. "Everyone has lapses—the MENRO, local government units and NGOs," says Marlyn Santiago, a WWF staff member. "The Bantay Dagat are confused as to who to follow among the three. They also have internal problems."

Raoul Cola, a WWF consultant, is more critical of what has transpired. Although he recognizes that the municipality did not have the resources to hire the Bantay Dagat at the time, he thinks it is wrong for NGOs to supply their salaries, because "it sows seeds of dependency." Eagle Point's Ton Francisco supports this view, "Yes, the Bantay Dagat has helped, but they have not been completely beneficial, and their work has not been fine-tuned. NGOs are still providing fuel, monitoring, buoys. They can't do it without outside help, which is why NGOs like WWF haven't been able to let them go." The accountability of a law enforcement body is also put into question if it is funded privately.

In the beginning of 2007, Tingloy's Bantay Dagat acquired new leadership, and began receiving their compensation from the municipal government. It remains to be seen how their Bantay Dagat will fare after these changes.

Bantay Dagat operations are the biggest expense category for the unified dive fee collections of Mabini and Tingloy.

Evolving Roles, Changing Demands IV

Sombrero Island, a landmark in Anilao

The first three case studies in this series produced by WWF-Philippines—on the Turtle Islands, El Nido, and Tubbataha Reefs—discussed the importance of governance in conservation, and this fourth study on Anilao makes the same point. The difference is that, although it is a recent development, the local governments of Mabini and Tingloy have become the driving force behind their own conservation fee system.

Prior to the conservation fee, the municipal governments were on the sidelines of conservation work. Coastal resources management used to be the domain of resorts, divers, and NGOs. At that time, the priority, particularly of the municipal government of Mabini, was industrialization, as evidenced by the factories lining the road on the way to the Calumpan Peninsula.

This remained the case until the need for conservation financing became very obvious, as private funding could not support conservation on a sustained basis. Although the willingness-to-pay survey indicated that the respondents preferred that the NGOs manage the fees, this was never really an option because of the legalities involved in collecting and managing such fees. In short, the conservation fee system of Anilao would not be where it is today, had the local government not given the issue the necessary support, attention, and patience.

The role played by Mayor Rowell Sandoval after the 2004 elections is often referred to by the local government staff as the strongest influence in pushing forward the CRMB and the conservation fee. Interestingly, both Mayor Sandoval of Mabini and Mayor Atienza of Tingloy were on their third and last terms as mayors when they began championing coastal resource management. When asked what brought about this change of heart, from their passive involvement to taking the lead, Mayor Atienza was very open in his reply: "It took us, Mayor Sandoval and myself, a while to learn about CRM." "It was new to us, and we didn't have technical knowledge about it then," agrees Mayor Sandoval. "Research results opened my eyes to the fact that CRM needed my attention. I also noticed that if I didn't give it my personal attention, my staff members were not enthusiastic about it." He also said that the friendship between him and Mayor Atienza was a strong influence in unifying their municipalities' conservation fees. "Had we not been friends, it might not have happened." This sentiment was not lost on Raoul Cola. "This indicates that in pushing a conservation agenda, it is not enough to work on the formal level. The informal level may be more important, and social networks can be tapped as social capital for conservation."

This collaboration is also praised by the provincial government. "We consider Mabini-Tingloy a model in the province," says Evelyn Estigoy of the provincial government's environment office. "Especially here, chances are there are overlapping municipal waters. That is why this model is very applicable in other towns."

Support from the provincial and national government could not be discounted, as well. Former Philippine President Fidel Ramos' dive in Anilao, and his planting of the famous cement cross on the Cathedral reef, was not merely symbolic. "It was important in bringing the LGUs around to conservation," says Cola.

Highlighting the importance of the local government, however, does not mean understating the role of the private sector. It would be equally true to say that without the resorts, divers, and NGOs, the municipal leaders of Mabini and Tingloy would not have gotten as involved in conservation as they have been. As related by Mayor Sandoval, it was the result of research and education activities that led to their enlightenment.

The key apparently lies in the respective stakeholders' ability to recognize and respect the changing roles they must play. The diving community and NGOs took the lead at a time when the local government was not yet ready to be there for conservation. When the time came for the local government to take center stage, the private sector provided support. The NGOs' role changed from that of implementer to facilitator.

This evolution of roles has not been easy, and the passing of the scepter is at best a bumpy ride. The national elections of May 2007 also meant a changing of the guard in the local government. With the local government now at the helm, all eyes are on them and how they will continue to manage not just the conservation fees, but the natural and environmental treasures that they have sworn to protect.

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