Workshop on sustainable management of seven Ramsar Sites in Philippines

3 November 2017
Philippines

A workshop for managers of seven Ramsar Sites was held on 24 October in Manila, Philippines.

The Ramsar Sites in the Philippines cover a range of wetland ecosystem types, including coral reef (Tubbataha Reef), tidal flats (Olango Island) and lakes (Naujan Lake), some of which conserve ecosystems from the ‘ridge to the reef’ (Puerto Princesa Underground River). Whilst all of the Sites are important for biodiversity, they also provide a range of ecosystem services such as flood control and water storage (Agusan Marsh), education (Las Piñas – Parañaque Critical Habitat and Ecotourism Area) as well as support the livelihood of local people by providing a rich ground for fisheries (Negros Occidental Coastal Wetlands Conservation Area).

Where appropriate, the management of a number of the Ramsar Sites aims to improve the livelihood of the local communities such as by employment as park staff or tourist guides, promoting local home stays, restaurant and souvenir shops, and using the income from entrance fee to the Site as grants for the communities.

A number of Ramsar Sites have adopted solar power for their energy use, recycling of their waste and promoting organic farming in and around the site to reduce inappropriate chemical use.

However, the Ramsar Sites still face threats such as illegal activities (e.g. mangrove harvesting and illegal fishing), threats from upstream (e.g. the input of polluted wastewater from sugar mills and siltation caused by forestry operations) and land reclamation for coastal development.

As part of the workshop a Site visits was organized to the NOCWCA Ramsar Site. To celebrate the designation of the Site as a Ramsar Site plaque was unveiled and a meeting was organized with local leaders and fishermen. The audience was interested in developing sustainable branded products for the Ramsar Site.

Visits were also made to other two potential Ramsar Sites, Apo Reef and Taal Lake. The former is the world's second-
largest contiguous coral reef system whilst the latter is a unique crater lake with a high potential for education and sustainable tourism.

Rattu Wiliame Katonivere, Paramount Chief of Macuata Province in Fiji joined the workshop. 134,900ha of Qoliqoli Cokovata fishing grounds is in the process of designation as Ramsar Site. The site forms part of the Cakaulevu (Great Sea Reef) which is the third longest continuous barrier reef in the world. The visit was sponsored by the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP).