

Is Palawan's Inner Malampaya Sound Overfished?

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the critical condition of Inner Malampaya Sound (IMS), a 165-km² stretch of estuary ecosystem located in the Malampaya Sound Protected Landscape and Seascape (MSPLS). The IMS is composed of eight contiguous barangays with varying socio-demographic characteristics and geographic attributes. Within its catchment are 18 rivers and streams, and 12 springs and waterfalls. Aside from its rich fishery resources, the MSPLS is home to Irrawaddy dolphins (*Orcaella brevirostris*), at least 10 ecologically important migratory species and a micro endemic clam locally known as “*Kabitsen*.” The methods used in this study included key informant interviews, household interviews, focus group discussion, and fieldwork to assess the status of its inshore fisheries. Results indicate that about 36% or 2,749 households in the IMS contiguous barangay are fishers. This translates to a fishing density of about 16.7 fishers/km², which is higher than the overfished Lingayen Gulf of 12.5 fishers/km². Majority of the fishers indicate that their catch rates have declined through the years. At least eight fishing gears are operating in the IMS which include gill nets (*lambat*) for fish or shrimp, traps (*bubo*) for crab or fish, and hook and line. At least 23 economically important fishes are caught in the IMS, of which 10 are also ecologically important. Given the nutrients that are leached from agriculture and the increasing numbers of users, the IMS fisheries is more vulnerable to resource depletion. Thus, barangay conservation areas (BCAs) are proposed to address environmental and fishing problems.

Keywords: inshore fisheries, estuary ecosystem, migratory species