

Project Update: December 2009

Our project has been going from strength to strength and we are now in the final stages of writing up the report as the end of the year approaches. It has been a very busy and productive year, and there have been a lot of developments with seaweed farming in the Philippines. The final feedback and consultation sessions with our respondent communities have just been conducted, which wraps up all our field activities under the current work plan.

Nick Hill returned from the Philippines to UK, with his team having completed over 3,300 24hr recall surveys and a further 500 interviews. The resulting databases are enormous and their management and maintenance turned out to be a very large undertaking which took much of Nick's time in the latter half of 2009. However, these databases provide a fantastic opportunity to answer the research questions we set out to ask, and a useful resource for linked socio-economic questions on resource use in the area. Nick will continue to work on the data collected as part of his PhD study with Project Seahorse.

The feedback and community consultation sessions were set for 11th December 2009 and used preliminary results that were extracted from the data collected and compiled in an internal report. PSF is now in the process of utilising the information from these consultation sessions and our results to develop the strategic plan for 2010-2012.

After returning from the Philippines, Nick was lucky enough to be able to spend 3 months from September to December as a visiting researcher in the Fisheries Centre at the University of British Columbia (UBC), Vancouver, Canada, where he was able to benefit from the broad range of expertise available.

One of the major news items with regards to seaweed farming are the plans that were unveiled by the Provincial Government of Bohol to develop up to 25,000 ha of seaweed farms over the next few years under a Memorandum of Understanding with a South Korean company. This will have huge implications for the marine resources of Danajon Bank where our study is focused and emphasises the importance of understanding the socio-economic effects of seaweed farming and the implications for conservation. In response to this declaration, Project Seahorse Foundation for Marine Conservation (PSF) convened a workshop with 10 pre-eminent Filipino marine scientists to formulate a set of recommendations. The research conducted in our study will play a vitally important role in helping to manage this expansion. An urgent need was also identified to understand the biological impacts of seaweed farming which are not covered in our current study. As such, a new PhD student has recently started with Project Seahorse at UBC to tackle specifically that problem.

On a sad note, Amado Blanco has now left PSF after many years of really productive work that has put the PSF team in a very strong position. A new National Director has been appointed and is due to start in January 2010.

Finally, the Project Seahorse website has been given a facelift and looks great with many new images.

You may also be interested in the recently released Project Seahorse 2008 Annual Report. This only details work conducted in 2008 so does not include work conducted as part of the Rufford Small Grants funded work, but it does include an article on seaweed farming. It can be downloaded from http://seahorse.fisheries.ubc.ca/Documents/AnnualReports/PS_AnnualReport2008.pdf