

**Asia / Pacific**

**Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park**  
**(as an extension of the Tubbataha Reef Marine Park)**

**Philippines**



## WORLD HERITAGE NOMINATION – IUCN TECHNICAL EVALUATION

### TUBBATAHA REEFS NATURAL PARK (PHILIPPINES) ID No. 653 bis

#### Background note:

At the time of the inscription of Tubbataha Reef Marine Park in 1993, IUCN recommended that **two nearby islets** with important reefs (Jessie Beazley Reef and Bastera Reef) be included in a future extension of the property. This recommendation was repeated in the state of conservation report on the property presented at the 28<sup>th</sup> Session of the World Heritage Committee in 2005. In August 2006, the State Party extended the National Marine Park to include Jessie Beazley Reef and renamed it the Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park (TRNP). The park's area was increased from 33,200 ha to **96,828 ha**. **The new boundaries and legal protection do not include Bastera Reef** which lies in a different municipality and at a greater distance from both Tubbataha north and south atolls and Jessie Beazley Reef. The present nomination is for an extension to the World Heritage property to the same boundaries as that of the TRNP.

#### 1. DOCUMENTATION

- i) **Date nomination received by IUCN:** 15 March 2008.
- ii) **Additional information officially requested from and provided by the State Party:** IUCN requested supplementary information after the first meeting of the World Heritage Panel in December 2008 related to a number of points concerning the management capacity and budget for the property. The State Party provide a response to IUCN on these points on 30<sup>th</sup> January 2009.
- iii) **IUCN/WCMC Data Sheet:** Sourced from nomination document which cites 22 references.
- iv) **Additional Literature Consulted:** White, A. T. and Vogt, H. P. (2000) **Marine Pollution Bulletin**. Volume 40, Issue 6, 537-550; Vallejo, B (2001) **The Biogeography of Philippine marine molluscs**. Loyola Schools Review 1: 58-77. White; A.T., Salamanca, A. and Courtney, C.A. (2002). **Experience with Marine Protected Area Planning and Management in the Philippines**. Coastal Management 30:1-26; Tongson, E. and Dygico, M (2004) **User Fee System for Marine Ecotourism: The Tubbataha Reef Experience**. Coastal Management, 32:17–23; Dygico, M. (2006). **Tubbataha Reefs: A Marine Protected Area that works. A Case Study on the Philippines**. WWF- Philippines. **Philippine Coral Reefs Under Threat: Lessons Learned After 25 Years of Community-Based Reef Conservation**. White, A. T., Gomez, E., Alcala, A. C., Russ, G. (2007). **Evolution and Lessons from Fisheries and Coastal Management in the Philippines**. Fisheries Management. 88-111; White A.T., Ovenden, M. (undated) **Tubbataha Reef National Marine Park in Palawan**. Available at <http://www.oneocean.org/>; Tubbataha Management Office (2008) Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park Business Plan. 7<sup>th</sup> Draft; Campos, W. and Belida, P. (2008) **Ichthyoplankton Assemblages in Atolls Along Cagayan Ridge, Sulu. Sea, Philippines**. 11<sup>th</sup> International Coral Reef Symposium; **Ramsar Information Sheet: Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park**. [www.ramsar.org/ris/key\\_ris\\_index.htm](http://www.ramsar.org/ris/key_ris_index.htm).
- v) **Consultations:** 3 external reviewers. Extensive consultations were undertaken during the field visit including with the Tubbataha Protected Area Management Board, and its members including Tubbataha Management Office, Local Government Unit of Cagayancillo, Palawan Coast Guard, and local community representatives. Meetings were held with Governor of Palawan, UNESCO National Commission, Department of Tourism, site management staff, NGO partners and tourism operators.
- vi) **Field Visit:** Jamili Nais and Josephine Langley, October 2008.
- vii) **Date of IUCN approval of this report:** 27 April 2009.

## 2. SUMMARY OF NATURAL VALUES

Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park (TRNP) is located in the Province of Palawan (municipality of Cagayancillo). The nomination put forward is for an extension to the existing Tubbataha Reef Marine Park World Heritage property to include Jessie Beazley Reef and would be a threefold increase in the area of the property to 96,828 ha. The nomination would coincide with the boundaries of the TRNP.

The nominated property is situated midway along the 120km Cagayan Ridge, which runs across the Sulu Sea and has an average depth of some 750 m. The extended property would include areas of open sea reaching depths of more than 2000m. In a few localities, seamounts reach the surface and provide a platform for the development of coral atolls that are the visible features of the nominated property. The TRNP consists of three reef areas: North and South Atoll, 8 km apart, and the smaller Jessie Beazley Reef, 20 km to the north of these. The North Atoll is an oblong platform 16 km long by 4.5 km wide, with Bird Islet, a 0.3 ha coralline sand cay. The South Atoll is a small triangular-shaped reef about 5 km long by 3 km wide with the South Islet, a coralline sand cay of about 0.08 ha, at its southern tip. Both islets are lightly vegetated and provide nesting sites for seabirds and marine turtles. Jessie Beazley Reef is 5 km long by 3 km wide. A cay is evident even at high tide and provides a bird roosting site and the area has extensive reef flats. The seaward reef edge drops to 100 m below sea level with often perpendicular 40-50m walls of coral-hung crevices, overhangs, ledges and caverns.

Research since the inscription of the property on the World Heritage List has increased the understanding of its natural values, and these are documented in the nomination dossier. An increased number of species has been identified and the conservation status of many species has changed. The two atolls within the existing property include 374 identified species of corals (65 threatened), 479 species of fish (7 threatened), 11 species of shark (4 threatened), 2 species of turtle (both threatened), 99 species of seabirds, including the threatened Christmas Island Frigate, 11 species of cetaceans (4 species threatened and all listed under CITES). Large schools of pelagic fish such as species of barracuda, jack, tuna, black-tip sharks and whale sharks are common in the open waters of the nominated property. The area is also reported to have the world's highest densities of whitetip reef sharks.

Jessie Beazley Reef has a higher proportion of soft corals compared to the other two atolls suggesting a more exposed reef. Spotted dolphin occur in the waters around Jessie Beazley Reef and had not previously been identified in the property. In 2004, the recorded fish biomass of Jessie Beazley Reef

was found to be significantly lower than in the other two Tubbataha atolls (126.25 mt/sq.km compared to 166.51 mt/sq.km). The difference was even more significant when commercially caught fish species were compared. This can be explained by the fact that commercial fishing continued on Jessie Beazley reef until 2006. Another possibility is this reef may have been less resilient to a coral bleaching event in 1998.

The Tubbataha area is a major nursery for fish and decapod larvae and, via the monsoon-driven currents, important to their dispersal in the fisheries of Palawan and other islands of the Sulu Sea. The two islets have five species of trees and four species of grass. The marine flora is much more diverse with its 45 species of benthic macroalgae and extensive seagrass beds on the shallower parts of the reef and lagoon.

## 3. COMPARISONS WITH OTHER AREAS

The nomination of 1993 emphasized a number of points in its comparative analysis. These included:

- Virtually the entire coastline of the Philippines is dotted with coral reefs. The largest concentration and most diverse reefs are near Palawan and its satellite islands where Tubbataha is found. In addition to Tubbataha, the important marine reserves in the country are found at Hundred Islands, Santa Cruz Islands, Sumilan, Turtle Island, and El Nido.
- Because of its remoteness and due to management activities, Tubbataha was considered the most intact and diverse of all the marine reserves in the Philippines, and the best documented example. Many other reefs in the region were poorly known and it was noted that there may be others that eventually prove as important (e.g. those found around the Spratly Islands).
- Marine parks with equal diversity and abundance of fishes were noted at Bunaken Marine Park in northern Indonesia, possibly, Cenderwasih in Irian Jaya and certainly the Pulau Seribu marine park off Java. Another strong World Heritage marine park prospect noted in the region is Palau's Ngerukewid Islands Wildlife Preserve. Comparing Tubbataha reefs with those of French Polynesia, the former has 46 genera of hard corals in 332 sq km of ocean while the latter have 51 genera in 2.5 million sq km of ocean. Tubbataha thus was considered to have a very concentrated diversity within the Coral Triangle centre of global marine biodiversity.
- The existing Great Barrier Reef World Heritage property was noted as significantly larger than Tubbataha. However, the Great Barrier Reef

encompasses an entire coastal multiple use area of 3.5 million sq km, of which 30% is closed to fisheries. Despite this difference in size, the condition of the reefs at Tubbataha was considered comparable.

- The 1993 comparison noted that: *“given the extent of reef degradation in the Philippines and generally throughout the Asian region, the reefs at Tubbataha stand out as one of the best intact marine sites and thus their presence is of particular importance. This conclusion is reflected in the attraction that the area has become for Scuba divers who rate the reefs at Tubbataha as one of the world’s top diving destinations.”*

A significant number of new marine protected areas have been established and researched in greater depth since TRNP was inscribed on the World Heritage List, and the basis for a comparative analysis for a new inscription would be different than that which is applied to the extension of an existing site. There are equally important and more outstanding marine protected areas within the Coral Triangle area. Nevertheless, the TRNP retains a distinctive importance and has a rich and diverse marine life and lies at the heart of the Coral Triangle, the epicentre of the world’s coral richness and diversity. The property is located within the Sulu-Sulawesi Marine Ecoregion, an area designated as a priority area for marine seascape conservation. It is also one of the few marine World Heritage properties which protects deep sea areas from fishing. The extended area of TRNP both brings new values not represented within the existing property, and brings a greater area of conservation value into the property. It thus strengthens the integrity of the property.

## 4. INTEGRITY

### 4.1. Protection

The Tubbataha Reef National Marine Park was established in 1988 under Presidential Decree No. 705, Proclamation No. 306. In 2006, the park was extended to an area of 96,828 ha to encompass the Jessie Beazley Reef by Presidential Proclamation 1126 and the park was renamed the Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park (TRNP). The property is classified as an IUCN Management Category II protected area as a National Park. TRNP operates as a ‘no-take’ protected area as provided for in the original decree of 1988, as well as the subsequent decree extending the park in 2006. TRNP is also protected by a range of other laws, and additional measures are currently under consideration to extend wider protection to the property through a buffer zone that is under discussion at the national level, and the early stages of consideration of the possible creation of an internationally recognised Particularly Sensitive Sea

Area (PSSA). The property would benefit from such measures to both reduce the potential impact of the very heavy shipping traffic in the Sulu sea and the oil and gas concessions that are located in the area surrounding property.

IUCN considers the protection status of the nominated property meets the requirements set out in the *Operational Guidelines*.

### 4.2 Boundaries

The boundaries of the nominated extended property allow for protection of the Jessie Beazley Reef together with the open sea areas between this reef and the existing inscribed property. These open sea areas provide sanctuary for pelagic species such as whales, dolphins, manta rays and seabirds among others. Although not noted as part of the nomination, IUCN understands that there is a proposal to establish a buffer zone up to 10 nautical miles wide adjoining the current park boundary. This has not at present been passed by the Philippines Congress. Depending on the policies adopted within it, the buffer zone would be important to help reduce the risk from shipping associated threats of ship strikes, pollution and the impacts of adjacent fishing activities.

There is no other reef near enough to TRNP that could feasibly be included within extended boundaries of the property at the present time. Bastera Reef was also recommended for extension at the time of inscription in 1993 but is not suitable for inclusion at this stage due to a variety of reasons including lack of political support and lack of protection. Also, due to the 50 nautical mile separation from the nominated property, the associated costs of management and patrolling are not currently feasible. Currently, separate efforts are underway to accord some form of protection to the Bastera Reef, and thus it might be possible for Bastera to eventually be a component in a future serial extension.

IUCN considers that the boundaries of the nominated extended property meet the requirements set out in the *Operational Guidelines*.

### 4.3 Management

The management of TRNP has evolved since it was first declared a protected area in 1988, and its inclusion on the World Heritage List in 1993. Despite continuing pressures, it is a relatively effectively protected coral reefs for its size in the region. The management regime is focused on strict protection, and delivered through a management consortium consisting of the Philippine central, provincial and municipal level of government, NGOs and some private sector donors.

Administratively, TRNP falls under the jurisdiction

of the Provincial Government of Palawan. In 1999, the Palawan Council for Sustainable Development established the Tubbataha Protected Area Management Board (TPAMB). The TPAMB replaced the Presidential Task Force as the managing authority of the TRNP (although the membership of the authority remained similar). The 2006 decree further established the TPAMB as the sole policy making and permit-granting body for the TRNP.

A Management Plan was approved in 1999 and updated in 2002, 2004 and 2007. The principal goals of the management plan include protection and management, survey and investigation, community development - focusing on the municipality of Cagayancillo. The management plan is adequate at the present time, although it is relatively brief and generalised and therefore represents a minimum level of planning. It does not address in detail the specific needs for the area included in the 2006 extension of the Natural Park. The plan also does not consider buffer zone policies at present, nor the management response to the wider threats to the property, through the development of risk management strategies or response strategies to the impacts of climate change.

The management operations of the TRNP are carried out by the Tubbataha Management Office (TMO) based in Puerto Princesa. The TMO consists of the Park Manager, assisted by two park rangers, a finance and administrative officer, an administrative assistant and two research assistants. The office facilities are insufficient for this team. Six to eight on-site rangers are based at a ranger station on the North Atoll, and include specially trained personnel of the Philippines Navy and Coastguard. The on-site operations are heavily reliant on the personnel and logistic support from the Navy and Coastguard.

There is a need to continue to enhance management capacity to effectively protect TRNP. The nominated extension almost triples the size of the property and includes mostly open seas. This larger area requires additional resources for adequate protection. At the time of the IUCN mission, the extended area could only be visited by patrol boats twice a week due to the fuel consumption and risk of engine and radio failure. IUCN requested supplementary information regarding identified shortfalls in the provision of boats, motors and staff following its evaluation mission. The State Party response confirms that the Department of Tourism has contributed two additional outboard engines, Conservation International is providing a new boat with an engine, and that funds were set aside for engine replacement. In relation to staffing, the supplementary information confirms that the Province of Cagayancillo has assigned its personnel to augment the law enforcement ranks. **The capacity of rangers and other staff to support prosecutions should be further developed. A clear security protocol**

and line of communication in any eventuality should be established, which should be understood by every member of the staff, on-site as well as at the TMO office at Puerto Princesa.

The estimated budget required for full implementation of the TRNP Management Plan is estimated in the nomination as requiring a minimum of USD 293,000 p.a. IUCN requested supplementary information regarding the provision of adequate resources for the management of the property, and noting that the budget has recently been in deficit. In its response the State Party reports that the Provincial Government of Palawan has agreed to provide funding of PHP4million (USD 83,000) annually towards the management costs of the property, and that work is underway to institutionalise this budget agreement. This increase is welcome, and if sustained provides a good basis to further enhance the budget for the management of the property. Nevertheless the financial situation of TRNP remains stretched and IUCN considers that further support from the State Party, and potentially from the international community is required.

Areas where further additional funding may be required include the provision of effective surveillance of the property, improved legal enforcement, awareness raising with local communities on alternative livelihoods to illegal fishing and management of tourism growth.

IUCN considers the management of the nominated property meets the requirements set out in the *Operational Guidelines*.

#### 4.4 Threats

Key threats identified for TRNP include the following:

##### 4.4.1 Illegal and destructive fishing

TRNP sits in the middle of the Sulu Sea and is vulnerable to local and foreign illegal fishers. In the period March 2006 to December 2008, site management carried out 38 arrests involving 314 fishers.

Most illegal fishers are Philippine nationals and many target the top shell 'trochus' for the international market. There is a need to allocate more funding to education of benefits of the property and awareness to prevent illegal fishing. Fish aggregating devices outside the property are also a threat, and are set to attract fish to leave the reserve. Preventing this could be a specific requirement of a buffer zone for the property.

Illegal fishing from international vessels is potentially more serious than from local fishers. Prosecution is also more difficult because of reported diplomatic pressure on politicians and the judiciary. Illegal

fishers have been apprehended in Tubbataha from China and Viet Nam. In January 2007, 30 Chinese poachers were apprehended with endangered species of Napoleon wrasse, red snapper and grouper on board.

While the high fish biomass, coral cover, and high density of sharks and high trophic level fish demonstrate the health of the north and south atolls in Tubbataha, the impact of decades of destructive fisheries is more evident in Jessie Beazley Reef where fishing only became illegal in 2006 and impacts of illegal fishing activities are still seen. There are good prospects for the continued recovery of Jessie Beazley Reef, which would be supported by its recognition as an extension of the existing World Heritage property.

#### 4.4.2 Tourism

Tourism generates 70% of the park revenue and offers potential alternative livelihoods for local communities. Currently, damage by tourists is considered insignificant compared to illegal and destructive fishing. There are plans in the business plan of TRNP to significantly increase visitation to the property. These should be implemented with careful consideration of capacity, zoning and/or rotation to give 'rest' periods to sections of the reef. Areas should be maintained with limited access except for research divers. Potential damage from anchors, pollution, and diver-induced damage should be properly addressed and mitigated, and visitor safety arrangements also need careful planning. Mooring areas need to be maintained and improved.

#### 4.4.3 Shipping

Shipping poses a threat to the property, as evidenced by the fact that two ships have been grounded in recent years. The potential to better regulate shipping in the area surrounding the property is discussed above. In terms of operational work the relevant maritime agencies in the Philippines should be encouraged to better distribute current charts with location of reef structures and property boundaries together with proposed buffer zone. Enhanced oil and hazardous waste spill response plans, and collaborative emergency response procedures are also required.

#### 4.4.4 Energy exploration

Oil exploration and exploitation in the Sulu Sea is a threat to the Park. Seismic surveys associated with petroleum exploration have the potential to cause localised disruption to marine mammals and should be carefully planned, assessed and monitored. Any exploration or exploitation of mines in the region surrounding the property should be subject to an Environmental Impact Assessment carried out to international standards of best practice, and should assess potential impact on the Outstanding Universal Value and integrity of the property. An oil

exploration concession previously included a portion of the nominated extended property but has been surrendered.

#### 4.4.5 Pollution

In addition to pollution risk from shipping and tourism vessels, plastic waste is evident on the reef flats, cays and has been observed in birds nests. It is a known threat to wildlife. Although it is unclear if these plastics are from passing vessels or pollution from land-based sources, the State Party is encouraged to increase its efforts to improve solid waste management of plastics in particular due to the negative impact on wildlife and the food chain.

#### 4.4.6 Climate and environmental change

Climate change poses a threat to the property in relation to possible sea surface temperature increases, erosion of sand cays, and potential acidification of the Sulu Sea. In 1998, approximately 20% of the living coral in Tubbataha was killed in a bleaching event linked to the El Niño event of that year. While the coral cover has fully recovered, indicating a resilient and healthy ecosystem, there is a need to continue to closely monitor reef health and water quality including acidity in particular. It will be important to monitor the status of the cays in Tubbataha and the impact on nesting bird populations.

A further area of concern regarding change relates to the vulnerability of seabirds. The whole Sulu Sea has some 37 small islands but the seabirds are able to breed freely in only three of them without the presence of humans, cats, dogs, rats, etc. Of the three uninhabited islands, two are within the TRNP. The cay on Bird islet of North Atoll is eroding, whilst that on Jessie Beazley reef is accreting. While such dynamism of cays is natural, it is important to note the risk to the highly vulnerable sea birds in this region and potential acceleration due to increased sea level/storm frequency which could occur in relation to climate change.

In summary, IUCN considers the nominated property meets the conditions of integrity as outlined in the *Operational Guidelines*. There are nevertheless many significant management challenges.

## 5. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

None.

## 6. APPLICATION OF CRITERIA

Tubbataha Reef Marine Park (the current name of the nominated property) was inscribed in 1993 under natural criteria (vii), (ix) and (x). The extension of the property is nominated under the same three criteria.

### **Criterion (vii): Superlative natural phenomena or natural beauty and aesthetic importance**

Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park contains excellent examples of pristine reefs with a high diversity of marine life. The property includes extensive reef flats and perpendicular walls reaching over 100m depth, as well as large areas of deep sea. The remote and undisturbed character of the property and the continued presence of large marine fauna such as tiger sharks, cetaceans and turtles, and big schools of pelagic fishes such as barracuda and trevallies add to the aesthetic qualities of the property.

IUCN considers that the nominated property meets this criterion.

### **Criterion (ix) Ecological processes**

Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park lies in a unique position in the middle of the Sulu Sea and is one of the Philippines oldest ecosystems. It plays a key role in the process of reproduction, dispersal and colonization by marine organisms in the whole Sulu Sea system, and helps support fisheries outside its boundaries. The property is a natural laboratory for the study of ecological and biological processes, displaying the ongoing process of coral reef formation, and supporting a large number of marine species dependant on reef ecosystems. The tiger and hammerhead sharks, are indicators of the ecological balance of the property. The property also offers a demonstration site to study the responses of a natural reef system in relation to the impacts of climate change.

IUCN considers that the nominated property meets this criterion.

### **Criterion (x) Biodiversity and threatened species**

Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park provides an important habitat for internationally threatened and endangered marine species. The property is located within the Coral Triangle, a global focus for coral biological diversity. The reefs of the property support 374 species of corals, almost 90% of all coral species in the Philippines. The reefs and seas of the property also support eleven species of cetaceans, eleven species of sharks, and an estimated 479 species of fish, including the iconic and threatened Napoleon wrasse. The property supports the highest population densities known in the world for white tip reef sharks. Pelagic species such as jacks, tuna, barracuda, manta rays, whale sharks and different species of sharks also are common here and the property is a very important nesting, resting and juvenile development area for two species of endangered marine turtles: green turtles and hawksbill turtles. There are seven breeding species of seabirds, and Bird Islet and South Islet are breeding grounds for seven resident

and endangered species of seabirds. The critically endangered Christmas Island Frigatebird is a regular visitor to the property.

IUCN considers that the nominated property meets this criterion

## **7. RECOMMENDATIONS**

IUCN recommends that the World Heritage Committee adopt the following draft decision:

The World Heritage Committee,

1. Having examined Documents WHC-09/[33.COM/8B](#), WHC-09/[33.COM/INF.8B.INF](#), and WHC-09/[33.COM/7B](#),
2. Approves the extension of the **Tubbataha Reef Marine Park, Philippines**, inscribed under natural criteria **(vii)**, **(ix)** and **(x)**, and takes note of the consequent revised name of the extended property, **Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park**, which replaces the previous name;
3. Adopts the following **Statement of Outstanding Universal Value**:

### **Brief Synthesis**

*Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park lies in a unique position in the centre of the Sulu Sea, and includes the Tubbataha and Jessie Beazley Reefs. It protects an area of almost 100,000 ha of high quality marine habitats containing three atolls and a large area of deep sea. The property is home to a great diversity of marine life. Whales, dolphins, sharks, turtles and Napoleon wrasse are amongst the key species found here. The reef ecosystems support over 350 species of coral and almost 500 species of fish. The reserve also protects one of the few remaining colonies of breeding seabirds in the region.*

### **Criteria**

**Criterion (vii):** *Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park contains excellent examples of pristine reefs with a high diversity of marine life. The property includes extensive reef flats and perpendicular walls reaching over 100m depth, as well as large areas of deep sea. The remote and undisturbed character of the property and the continued presence of large marine fauna such as tiger sharks, cetaceans and turtles, and big schools of pelagic fishes such as barracuda and trevallies add to the aesthetic qualities of the property.*

**Criterion (ix):** Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park lies in a unique position in the middle of the Sulu Sea and is one of the Philippines' oldest ecosystems. It plays a key role in the process of reproduction, dispersal and colonization by marine organisms in the whole Sulu Sea system, and helps support fisheries outside its boundaries. The property is a natural laboratory for the study of ecological and biological processes, displaying the ongoing process of coral reef formation, and supporting a large number of marine species dependant on reef ecosystems. The presence of top predator species, such as tiger and hammerhead sharks, are indicators of the ecological balance of the property. The property also offers a demonstration site to study the responses of a natural reef system in relation to the impacts of climate change.

**Criterion (x):** Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park provides an important habitat for internationally threatened and endangered marine species. The property is located within the Coral Triangle, a global focus for coral biological diversity. The reefs of the property support 374 species of corals, almost 90% of all coral species in the Philippines. The reefs and seas of the property also support eleven species of cetaceans, eleven species of sharks, and an estimated 479 species of fish, including the iconic and threatened Napoleon wrasse. The property supports the highest population densities known in the world for white tip reef sharks. Pelagic species such as jacks, tuna, barracuda, manta rays, whale sharks and different species of sharks also are common here and the property is a very important nesting, resting and juvenile development area for two species of endangered marine turtles: green turtles and hawksbill turtles. There are seven breeding species of seabirds, and Bird Islet and South Islet are breeding grounds for seven resident and endangered species of seabirds. The critically endangered Christmas Island Frigatebird is a regular visitor to the property.

### **Integrity**

The property comprises two atolls (North and South Atoll) and an emergent coral cay, Jessie Beazley Reef. It includes open sea with an average depth of 750 m and still displays a well preserved marine ecosystem with top predators, and a large number and diversity of coral reef and pelagic species. The property also hosts an important population of resident, nesting and feeding seabirds. The area is free of human habitation and activities and is of a sufficient size to maintain associated

biological and ecological processes. The property is of an adequate size to ensure the complete representation of the key features and processes of the reef systems, although the maintenance of its values also requires measures to be taken outside the boundaries of the property in relation to some migratory species and the buffering of the property from threats to the marine environment that could occur in the wider area. A key aspect of the integrity of the property is the low level of fishing pressure, due to the no-take policies which are in place throughout its area.

### **Management and protection requirements**

Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park is legally protected through national protected areas legislation and a range of other environmental legislation which enable action to be taken against a wide range of threats. The implementation of this legislation is assisted by clear delegation to the management authority for the property. This is a remote property and its management is therefore a significant logistical challenge, requiring a well-equipped team with operational boats, well trained and well equipped staff and a sufficient operating budget for fuel, maintenance and accommodation to ensure a strong and responsive presence on the water. Tourism visitation requires careful planning and management to ensure the values of the property are maintained, and to respect the capacity of the property, as well as visitor safety and to ensure income is returned to both site management and local communities. There are threats to the property from shipping, marine litter and land-based sources of pollution, fishing, marine pollution and oil exploration. Thus, effective buffer zone arrangements are needed, and internationally supported legislation to protect the property from shipping threats, and greater enforcement of marine litter regulation on the High Seas by the appropriate international organisations would be a significant benefit to the property.

4. Thanks the State Party for acting on the Committee's 1993 recommendation that the area of the property be extended, and for the action in response to the Committee's previous consideration of state of conservation issues affecting the existing property;
5. Commends the State Party and specifically the Province of Palawan and the Tubbataha Protected Area Management Board for the progress in managing the property, and the allocation of increased budgets and equipment to the property, and also acknowledges



- the important technical and financial support provided by the Non Governmental Organisation partners;
6. Welcomes the inter-agency cooperation at the Provincial and National levels to support the extended property; and encourages these stakeholders to continue this work particularly towards improving enforcement and halting illegal fishing activities, assessing the relevance of designation of Particularly Sensitive Sea Areas for the region surrounding the property, and ensuring the sustainable financing of the management of the property;
  7. Also welcomes the boundary changes to oil concession areas near to the extended property which will reduce their potential impacts, and encourages the State Party to ensure that concession holders respect the Outstanding Universal Value and integrity of the property; noting in particular the sensitivity of marine mammals to acoustic research methods and the potential risk to the values and integrity of the property from pollution;
  8. Regrets that illegal fishing continues to affect the existing and extended property, and urges the State Party to continue to seek ways to increase compliance with the no-take policies within the extended property;
  9. Requests the State Party to put in place a programme of ecological monitoring of the extended property, particularly the effect of climatic events on sea surface temperature and coral bleaching, storm frequency and other factors that could be related to climate change;
  10. Also requests the State Party to develop a tourism strategy in collaboration with stakeholders and fishing community to ensure that increased tourism does not impact the Outstanding Universal Value and integrity of the property;
  11. Also requests the State Party to provide the World Heritage Centre by 1 February 2011 a report on the state of conservation of the property, including progress in establishing a buffer zone, reducing illegal fishing activities, continued provision of adequate funding for the management of the property and the other issues noted above, for examination by the Committee at its 35<sup>th</sup> session in 2011.

Map 1: General location of nominated property and its extended boundaries.

