

Govt to create marine preserve in Nusa Penida

Maritime Affairs and Fisheries Ministry says it will create a marine preserve in the waters around Nusa Penida Island in Bali. The ministry's marine national park and waters conservation director, Riyanto Basuki, said that the government would divide the preserve into at least four zones to allow for activities such as tourism and sustainable fishing.

"We will work with the local community during the zoning process. Hopefully, there will be no residual problems or conflicts between fisheries and conservation activities once we officially declare Nusa Penida a protected marine area," he said at the launch of two books on the area's marine resources. Nusa Penida is part of the so-called Coral Triangle, an area containing hundreds of coral species in an area spanning Indonesia, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Solomon Islands and Timor Leste.

About two-thirds of the Nusa Penida area is located in Klungkung regency. More than 200,000 tourists visit the island every year to experience scenery and marine life unrivalled by other venues in Bali. According to an ecological assessment conducted in 2009, Nusa Penida has 296 coral species and 576 fish species, including five recently discovered species. The endangered ocean sunfish, is an icon of Nusa Penida, along with manta rays, sea turtles and sharks.

The ocean sunfish, also known as mola mola, is a deep sea fish that inhabits the shallows around Nusa Penida between July to September and attracts divers from around the world. The government is preparing the zoning policy in consultation with several NGOs, including The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and the Coral Triangle Center (CTC).

A regulation will be issued to protect the area after the Nusa Penida marine preserve is zoned, which is expected to occur before 2012. CTC learning site manager Marthen Welly said that the zoning policy would designate 18,000 hectares for sustainable fisheries, 1,200 hectares for marine tourism, 500 hectares for seaweed farming and about 200 hectares for a core conservation zone.

"The zoning will determine where people can dive, fish and cultivate seaweed," he said. CTC had held 33 meetings at the village, subdistrict and regency level to develop consensus for making Nusa Penida a protected marine area, Marthen said. Nusa Penida comprises one part of an estimated 4.5 million hectares that are expected to be designated as marine conservation areas by 2014.

The designation of Nusa Penida as a marine protected area was first discussed in 2009 and entered the "blue" or "green" level in 2011, indicating good progress.

"It should be a good example for any regent or mayor who is committed to designing their particular area as a conservation area," Riyanto said, adding that the government would expand Indonesia's marine protected areas to 20 million hectares by 2020 from 10 million hectares in 2010.

"I hope Nusa Penida can be more sustainably managed – not only for better conserved natural resources but also for the sake of the people's prosperity," Klungkung Regent I Wayan Candra said in a statement that was conveyed by his deputy, Tjokorda Gede Agung.