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Environmet Watch: Gili Trawangan protects coral reefs

State oil and gas company Pertamina plans to again help a coral reef transplantation program run by the local community in Gili Trawangan, North Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara through a Rp 50 million (US\$5,850) donation.

“As long as the implementation of the program is good and benefits the community, we will consider resuming the program, including the coral development program in Gili Trawangan,” Rustam Aji, the spokesman of Pertamina’s Surabaya office, which oversees East Java, Bali and Nusa Tenggara, said Wednesday in Gili Trawangan.

Rustam added that Pertamina gave Rp 50 million in 2010 to build 14 coral reef cultivation units as part of its corporate social responsibility (CSR) program. The funds are managed by the NGO Gili Eco Trust in Gili Indah village.

He said that each year, Pertamina gave out Rp 3.5 billion through its CSR programs to fund education, healthcare, environmental and post-disaster infrastructure restoration schemes.

“We heard from our Ampenan Pertamina fuel depot on Lombok that residents of Gili Trawangan were working to preserve coral reefs. In 2010 we supported the cause and the results can be seen now. A lot of the new corals are flourishing,” Rustam said.

An official from the Gili Trawangan branch of the National Marine Conservation Board (BKKPN), Sabil, said efforts to develop coral reefs in Gili Trawangan, Gili Meno and Gili Air had been run since 1998 by the local community.

He said public awareness of the importance of preserving coral reefs grew following severe coral degradation in the 1990s as the result of blast fishing, arbitrary placement of anchors by ships and the impacts of climate change.

“Damage to coral results in destroyed fish habitats, and that affects the incomes of local fishermen, which is why the community is taking steps to preserve the reefs,” Sabil said.

The gradual efforts has attracted the support of many parties, including Pertamina, which is helping to build artificial concrete reefs, and Gili Eco Trust, which is using the Biorock technique to grow artificial reefs using electrical currents. Sabil said the state of coral reefs around the three islands were improving and were home to many fish species and sea turtles, a big draw for tourists.

“There are 17 diving spots here where the reefs are healthy. Many visitors visit the islands to snorkel, dive and see fish and turtle. The favorable conditions contributes indirectly to the development of the community,” he said.