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### **ABSTRACT**

Locally managed marine protected areas (MPAs) were established supposedly to reverse the declining health of marine resources. But whether or not these MPAs are meeting the goals for which they have been set up is not always clear. To achieve the desired results, management has to be effective. Measuring management effectiveness is not just a self-monitoring exercise for managers but is also crucial for improving overall governance. This study compared the management effectiveness of five MPA sites using the MPA Management Effectiveness Assessment Tool (MEAT). Additionally, coral reef and reef fish biomass data of the study sites were also gathered to determine whether MPA management effectiveness translate to MPAs performing better in terms of their bio-physical attributes.

The five study sites were as follow: Tagaliling MPA (TMPA) in Mati, Davao Oriental; Magliling MPA (MMPA) in Tarragona, Davao Oriental; Rising Sun MPA (RSMMPA) in Manay, Davao Oriental; Sanipaan Marine Park (SMP) in Samal, Davao del Norte; and Lanuza Marine Park and Sanctuary (LMPS) in Lanuza, Surigao del Sur. All are locally managed MPAs but considerable support were provided through externally funded projects. TMPA, MMPA, RSMMPA, and LMPS garnered total cumulative scores that classified them as having “very good” management according to the MEAT; SMP, on the other hand, scored enough to qualify for “excellent” management. The relatively high scores were due mainly to the MPA’s enforcement system, sustainable financing schemes, monitoring and evaluation protocols, and the organization of the management body. When the management effectiveness scores of the five MPA study sites were compared with the biological indicators for the MPAs, however, it was found that no statistically significant correlation exists between management effectiveness and coral cover nor for management effectiveness and fish biomass. This result applies only for the five study sites and should not be taken to mean that management effectiveness does not impact biophysical conditions. What the results do underscore is the bias of the tool towards measuring governance inputs and processes but not necessarily its biological outcomes.

Keywords: marine protected areas, MPA management, MPA MEAT