

2ND INTERNATIONAL TROPICAL MARINE ECOSYSTEM MANAGEMENT SYMPOSIUM (ITMEMS 2)

RP Hosts International Marine Symposium

■ By DENR Public Affairs Office

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Some 248 participants, composed mostly of marine experts from 37 countries and 19 institutions and funding agencies have mapped out a comprehensive plan to save coral reefs and the many life forms during the 2nd International Tropical Marine Ecosystem Management Symposium (ITMEMS 2) held from March 24 to 27, 2002 at the Westin Philippine Plaza, Manila, Philippines.

With the Philippines as host country, Environment Secretary Elisea G. Gozun welcomed the delegates to the symposium, which was organized by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and the International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI) Secretariat, per the approval of the ICRI Coordinating and Planning Committee. Former Philippines President Fidel V. Ramos delivered keynote messages to the international attendees.

ICRI is an environmental partnership organized in 1994 by the governments of the United States, Australia, France, Jamaica, Japan, Philippines, Sweden, and United Kingdom with World Bank and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to stop and reverse the global degradation of coral reefs and related ecosystems, i.e. mangroves, seagrass and estuarine areas.

In 1995, ICRI adopted a "Call to Action" that urged governments to act on a concerted action to conserve coral reefs, and a "Framework for Action" which sets the objectives for governments, funding institutions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), private sector and stake-

holders for the sustainable development of coral reef resources.

Since then, it has enjoined the US Agency for International Development (USAID), World Wildlife Fund (WWF), International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), Regional Seas organisations and international conventions such as the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and Ramsar Convention on Wetlands.

Together, ICRI partners aim to mobilize governments and a wide range of stakeholders in an effort to improve management practices, increase capacity and political support, as well as share information on the health of the corals and related ecosystems.

The ICRI Secretariat functions as the operational arm of ICRI under the guidance of a Coordinating and Planning Committee. The Secretariat is currently co-hosted by the governments of Sweden and the Philippines, through the DENR.

Major activities organized by the ICRI Secretariat included three Regional Workshops for East Asia (Cebu, Philippines: April 2-4, 2001); Regional Workshop for the Indian Ocean (Maputo, Mozambique: November 26-29, 2001); and Regional Workshop for the Tropical Americas (Cancun, Mexico: June 2-4, 2003); and several CPC Meetings. These activities successfully updated regional priorities for implementation on the conservation of coral reefs and related ecosystems.

As host of the ICRI Secretariat and as part of the ICRI Action Plan for 2001-2002, the DENR organized

ITMEMS 2 as a culminating activity of its term as co-chair of the ICRI Secretariat.

ITMEMS 2 was organized in collaboration with the UNEP, USAID, International Coral Reef Action Network (ICRAN) and SIDA.

It was participated in by coral reef managers and key players in the management and conservation of coral reefs and associated ecosystems from countries with coral and coastal resources, and various regional bodies (e.g. UNEP RCUs, IUCN, Coral Reef Degradation in the Indian Ocean (CORDIO), South Asia Co-operative Environment Program (SACEP), Regional Organization for the Conservation of the Environment of the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden (PERSGA).

International funding institutions (e.g. USAID, World Bank, SIDA), government and NGOs (e.g. Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority—GBRMPA, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Organization (NOAA) Conservation International (CI), The Nature Conservancy (TNC), WWF), international conventions (e.g. CBD) and academic institutions (e.g. James Cook University), shared experiences and lessons learned through a multi-disciplinary consideration of management-related case studies.

The ITMEMS 2 process offered opportunities to discuss gaps in the current management of tropical coastal ecosystems and identify priority actions and recommendations that should be addressed in the implementation of the ICRI Framework for Action and in response to the Plan of Implementation of the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) held in Johannesburg, South Africa. ■



**DENR Secretary
Elisea G. Gozun**