
[Philippines: remaining mangroves under siege](#)

Only 3% of the dense rainforests that once existed in The Philippines is still standing and less than 1% of the former forest is still in a pristine state (see WRM Bulletin 27). The Province of Aurora, which comprises a strip of land between the Sierra Madre mountains and the Pacific Ocean, is an exception, because unlike most of the country, it still maintains over 50% of its original forest cover, even some as primary forests. Along the coastline there are 430 hectares of mangroves. The area is also home of the Dumagat and the Igorot indigenous peoples and shelters some endangered species.

In the early 1990s, the shrimp farm Diapitan Resources Development Corporation (DRDC) began to operate in the area. Its intensive operational system -which comprises high stocking densities, concrete ponds, water pumping, feeding with pellets and application of chemicals and chlorine- have provoked concern among the residents of the villages of Masagana and Maligaya. Already in September 1997 they presented a complaint in relation to the environmental impact of DRDC's activities, such as salinization of groundwater in wells which provide fresh water to the towns, skin irritations suffered by mangrove fishers who gather shellfish near the shrimp farm, fish kills and deformities attributed to chemical pollution, severe reduction in fish catch near the shore, coral deaths due to deposition of pond sludge, and alteration of river banks, limiting access of artisanal fishing boats and causing flooding during heavy rains.

Nevertheless, the company is planning to expand its shrimp farming activities to the adjacent municipality of Casiguran. This is the third site that DRDC has tried to develop. Their first option to expand their present site in Dilasag had to be abandoned due to the strong opposition of local residents, and the permission for the second target area -a proposed marine protected area in Casapsapan Bay- was denied by the local government. A coalition of environmental NGOs and concerned people -called Aurora Support Group- has been formed to protect these mangroves and to avoid the expansion of DRDC in the area.

Industrial shrimp farming does not only provoke negative environmental impacts, but also social ones. Although shrimp farms promise employment and improved living standards for local communities, this is seldom the case. In The Philippines, detailed studies of two communities in Iloilo and Aklan, in the central region of the country, have shown that local dwellers do not receive any benefit from this activity. Only low-paid, unskilled jobs are available to local people, while managerial and technical posts go to outsiders, and profits to the owners and shareholders of the company. Additionally, small-scale fishers lose their livelihood as mangroves are cut and marine resources degraded.

National legislation recognises the ecological, social and economic importance of mangroves. Their cutting is banned and moreover, a mangrove greenbelt along rivers and facing seas and oceans is required by various laws. However, as in this case, reality differs very much from what the law states.

For more information on the issue, please visit Industrial Shrimp Action Network's web site: www.shrimpaction.org

