

Message for BlueCARES

Michael Lim Tan, DVM, PhD
Chancellor of University of the Philippines Diliman

The University of the Philippines Diliman is privileged to be a partner in the JICA-supported project for “Comprehensive Assessment and Conservation of Blue Carbon Ecosystems and Their Services in the Coral Triangle (Blue CARES)”.

Awareness of the need for environmental conservation has grown in leaps and bounds over the last few decades, but we seem to have overlooked our coastal ecosystems, particularly mangroves, tidal marshes, and seagrasses. Given the archipelagic nature of the two partner countries in this Blue CARES project – Indonesia and the Philippines – these coastal ecosystems could very well be our richest, yet most unrecognized, natural resource, considering its many roles as nursery grounds for fish, buffers against storms, and a place for the sequestration of carbon from the atmosphere and oceans, which gives these ecosystems their name—“blue carbon ecosystems”.

We need to catch up on lost time to unlock the many mysteries of blue carbon ecosystems,



obtaining information not only about each of the ecosystems but also about the ecotones or the overlapping or transition areas for two or more ecosystems, which are so common in coastal areas.

The new knowledge that we derive from this work should not be limited to the natural sciences. Social issues must also be tackled. There is irony in the fact that the coastal areas support so many human settlements and yet these communities are the most impoverished and excluded from development. In the last few decades, the potential of these

coastal areas for tourism has been discovered but, sadly, we have seen all too often that the tourism lacks ecological awareness, contributing to the destruction, rather than regeneration, of the ecosystems.

I hope to see University of the Philippines Diliman helping to “translate” the technical research into information that can be used by policy-makers, local governments, and, most important, the communities who are the front-liners in the defense of the blue carbon ecosystems.