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Marine Protected Areas Protect Villagers As Well As Reefs in Raja Ampat [Photo Essay]

Residents describe how their lives have improved since illegal practices stopped

By Brendan Borrell | Sunday, April 14, 2013 | 1 comments

The creation of seven vast marine parks in the indigenous territories of Papua, Indonesia, has made the islands of Raja Ampat a test case for the impact of conservation on local people. Many conservationists have considered the positive social benefits of marine protected areas to be a foregone conclusion. But if it turns out that the effects on locals are negative, or that the people just ignore conservation rules, then better strategies to preserve ocean biodiversity and seafood resources would have to be developed immediately.

As described in my article, “Let the Fish Breathe,” in the April 2013 issue of *Scientific American*, researchers from the World Wildlife Fund and the University of Papua are monitoring villages in Raja Ampat, to examine how marine protected areas influence health, economic well-being, education and cultural preservation. Here, the residents of Raja Ampat explain the problems of illegal fishing and dangerous practices and how their lives have changed since the protected areas were established, an effort led by Conservation International. (Interviews have been condensed and edited for clarity.)

Trofinus Dailom: Church leader Trofinus explains his support of the sea cucumber “sasi” (seasonal closure) in the village of Kalitoco. “Since the old times, I have eaten sea cucumber, grouper and jack. We never cook sea cucumber. We skin it and put some lemon and chili on it like ceviche. In the 1990s a lot of people were coming from the outside with a big net and caught lots of fish. After Conservation International came, we stopped the nets and feel there is some improvement. We no longer use *aker bore* [an herb to stun fish] and have a sasi for sea cucumber. That means if we cannot find big sea cucumbers, we must close the fishery so it can recover. We also know where the fish lay their eggs, and we do not go in that area.”



Image: Brendan Borrell (4)

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Brothers Abdulralif Dailom (left) and Nurdin Dailom (right): Because Abdulralif is mute, Nurdin narrated the story of Abdulralif's life and how his brother became partially paralyzed diving for shellfish in the village of Lopintol. "In 2008, the men came from Sorong with the compressor and hookah and asked us to dive for shellfish. We would get paid 1000 rupiah (\$0.10) for each one. Around 12 p.m., my brother dives deeper than anyone else and stays for 36 minutes. He is brave. He saw a lot of shellfish and collected many. He came up and felt fine at first. After he sat and rested, he began to feel dizzy and passed out. After that, we thought if we put him underwater he will get better. We put him at 10 meters, 20 meters, then at the surface. He was awake but could not feel his feet anymore. It is difficult for him to work, but he can still row for me when we go fishing. About one month after the accident, the men came back from Sorong to pay us money for the shellfish. They never came again. After Conservation International came here, we have rules that we shouldn't dive too deep or too long and cannot use compressors."



Herpil Kabes: A former bomb fisherman, Herpil, from Batanta, gave up the practice of hurling fertilizer bombs into the sea to catch fish, and is training to become a dive guide at Papua Diving. "You can get many more fish if you use a bomb. Here, we have two kinds of bombs, one for Spanish mackerel and one for deep water. It's very dangerous. I know two or three people who lost their hands. My

friend Mesak was too late throwing the bomb and it blew up both his hands. He still uses the bomb by putting it at his elbow. Then, he lights the fuse with his cigarette and throws it. The first time I made a bomb, I felt sad when I saw the coral I destroyed. Now, I am training to be a diving guide with Max Ammer at Papua Diving. I help Max patrol the sea, because I know how to find bombs. Maybe when I am older, Raja Ampat will be more beautiful because people will take care of it.”



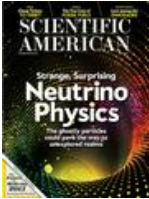
Dortheus Mentansan: Local conservationist Dortheus is head of Conservation International’s enforcement and resource monitoring team in Mayalibit Bay. “Out of all of the marine protected areas in Raja Ampat, our patrol team in Mayalibit Bay has caught the most illegal fishermen. If I was alone, then I would be scared, but we are usually in a team so I don’t feel scared. We always have four people from the local community join us for one week, and sometimes we have the marine police with us. The community feels the benefits of the patrol activities, and many villagers told me they are happy.”



Credit: Brendan Borrell

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