

PART 6 PARK PROPOSAL

SUMMARY

- Park status recognises areas of exceptional importance within Sabah, and provides a means of managing them for the benefit of people and the environment. It allows for a co-ordinated approach and gives strong legislative backing for conservation measures.
- The Semporna islands and reefs are of high conservation value and have many other important attributes that merit designation as a State Park.
- The overall management goal for the park will be to protect and conserve natural features, habitats and species, whilst providing for ecologically sustainable use of the area. Specific objectives are to:
 - Protect, maintain and enhance biodiversity and the health of the environment.
 - Maximise opportunities for economic development and ecologically sustainable use of the area and its resources.
 - Ensure local people are involved in, and benefit from, the creation of the park.
 - Build community and public awareness about the importance of establishing and maintaining the park.
- The park will cover about 350 sq km and include eight islands and their associated reefs: Boheydulang, Bodgaya, Tetagan, Sebangkat, Selakan, Maiga, Sibuan and Mantabuan. It will also include Church Reef and Kapikan Reef, both of which dry in parts at low tide.
- Zones will be created in order to separate potentially conflicting activities and ensure the objectives for the park are met. The recommended zones and boundaries are based on current understanding of the ecology of the area, conservation and human needs and the opportunities and threats associated with different activities.



Figure 69. Anemonefish
Amphirion ocellaris.



Figure 70. Traditional fishing will continue in the park

6.1. JUSTIFICATION

Park status recognises areas of exceptional importance in Sabah, and the Semporna islands and reefs have been acknowledged for many years as falling into this category. Further studies carried out during the Semporna Islands Project have confirmed this view. The Sabah Tourism Masterplan (1996) strongly endorses the Marine Park concept for Semporna and the range of tourism opportunities that it would provide. Many other attributes combine to make a strong case for gazetting the park, as summarised below:

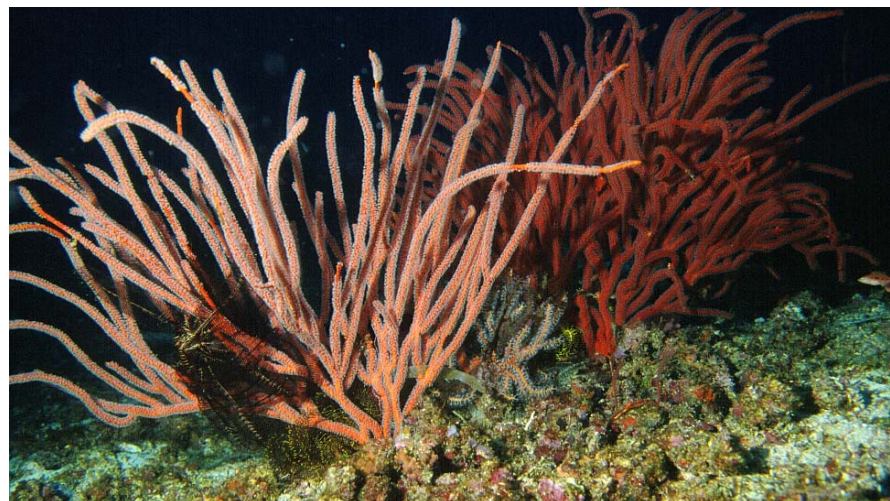
6.1.1. ENVIRONMENTAL

- ❑ Unique geology of the central islands – they are the only islands in Sabah made of volcanic rock.
- ❑ High aesthetic value, with dramatic islands, beautiful beaches and varied underwater scenery.
- ❑ Important natural unit, comprising a large, interconnected system of reefs and islands.
- ❑ Exceptional diversity of marine habitats including seagrass beds, sheltered shallow reefs, steep outer reefs, patch reefs, bank reefs and deep reef plains, each with their own particular communities of plants and animals.



Figure 71. View of the lagoon and Southern Rim Reef from Boheydulang

Figure 72.
Colourful sea
whips: common
towards the base
of many reef
slopes



- ❑ Higher diversity of marine species than found so far at other marine sites in Sabah. For example, over 520 species of fish, 255 species of coral and 140 species of sponge have been recorded. A significant number are new records for Malaysia.
- ❑ Within the area are many marine species previously unknown for Malaysia, including a number of new species, yet to be described.
- ❑ Regionally important from a biogeographic perspective due to the presence of a number of marine and terrestrial species not found elsewhere in Sabah or Malaysia.
- ❑ The scrub community developed on the volcanic rocks is one of Borneo's most unusual natural communities. The coastal mixed forest on the main islands is also notable, and better developed than on other islands off the east coast of Sabah.

6.1.2. Economic

- ❑ Marine and terrestrial resources of direct use and economic value to local people and the economy of the State.
- ❑ Established seaweed culture programme bringing benefits in terms of employment and income.
- ❑ Potential for other low-impact mariculture projects – such as giant clams and pearls.
- ❑ Excellent potential for development of eco-tourism which if properly managed will bring conservation as well as economic benefits.
- ❑ Marine and terrestrial systems also of indirect economic value, for example through links with other ecosystems, species and bio-physical processes.

6.1.3. Social and cultural

- ❑ The central islands in particular are well known landmarks with their own history and legends.
- ❑ Local communities are looking to park management for help in maintaining livelihoods and a healthy environment.
- ❑ Many opportunities exist for education, nature study and research.
- ❑ Unique mix of ethnic groups with their own cultures and identity.
- ❑ People in the area with traditional skills, including craftwork and boat building.

6.2. MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES, POLICIES AND ACTIONS

Management objectives for the park have evolved during the course of the Semporna Islands Project, and are presented below. It is these objectives that drive the management plan, but they should not be considered as final and unchangeable. The success of the park will depend on a degree of flexibility, and as time goes on, there may need to be modifications to meet changing needs or circumstances.

Management goal

To protect and conserve the natural features, habitats and species of the Semporna Islands Park whilst providing for ecologically sustainable use of the area and its resources.

To achieve this overall goal, the following **objectives and actions** were established by the SIP Core Management Unit and Advisory Committee, in consultation with local communities and interested parties:

A. Protect, maintain and enhance biodiversity, the quality of the environment and ecosystem function by:

- A.1. Ensuring that conservation is a high priority in all parts of the park, including those set aside for sustainable use.
- A.2. Protecting and maintaining the integrity of representative, vulnerable, rare and/or key marine and terrestrial habitats and their communities.
- A.3. Protecting and managing populations of rare, endangered, endemic and/or key species.
- A.4. Promoting recovery and natural re-colonisation of disturbed and/or degraded sites by removing threats and providing the best conditions for these processes to succeed.
- A.5. Rehabilitating selected sites using low-cost techniques.
- A.6. Developing strategies for dealing with natural ecological disturbances (e.g. crown-of-thorns starfish, sponge infestation, coral bleaching).
- A.7. Maintaining a healthy, unpolluted environment.
- A.8. Maintaining the aesthetic qualities of the islands and reefs.

B. Maximise opportunities for economic development and ecologically sustainable use of the area and its resources by:

- B.1. Reviewing options and developing appropriate strategies for sustainable use.
- B.2. Introducing measures to halt the current over-exploitation of both terrestrial and marine species and ensure future use is sustainable.
- B.3. Introducing measures to prevent further environmental degradation and loss of biodiversity caused by human activities.
- B.4. Developing plans to promote recovery of species and habitats of commercial importance or economic benefit.
- B.5. Ensuring that all future activities are properly managed and do not conflict with each other or with the conservation objectives for the park.
- B.6. Creating or developing alternative activities and livelihoods which take pressure off the area's natural resources, in consultation with the local community

C. Ensure the local community are involved in, and benefit from, the development of the park by:

- C.1. Establishing and maintaining a local community forum to ensure that people can participate in discussions and planning for the park and its management.
- C.2. Ensuring jobs are fairly spread amongst the local community and boost the local economy.
- C.3. Maintaining and promoting cultural and social values.

D. Build community and public awareness about the importance of establishing the park by:

- D.1. Developing and maintaining an awareness and education programme aimed at all sectors – (e.g. local government, private sector, local community, schools).
- D.2. Developing a research and monitoring programme to address key management issues and support the educational initiatives.
- D.3. Ensuring mechanisms are in place to gauge the success of the educational and research programmes.

6.3. BOUNDARY

The idea to establish a marine park around the Bodgaya islands has been debated for over 20 years. A number of proposals have been made, and the boundary has been changed several times. The most recent notice of intention to gazette the area was published in 1992, and the boundary suggested at that time is shown in Figure 73. This includes the central islands and most of the outlying islands and reefs associated with the Bodgaya islands complex. However, part of Kapikan Reef is outside the proposed boundary, as are Pu Sebangkat, Pu Selakan, and part of the reef associated with these two islands.

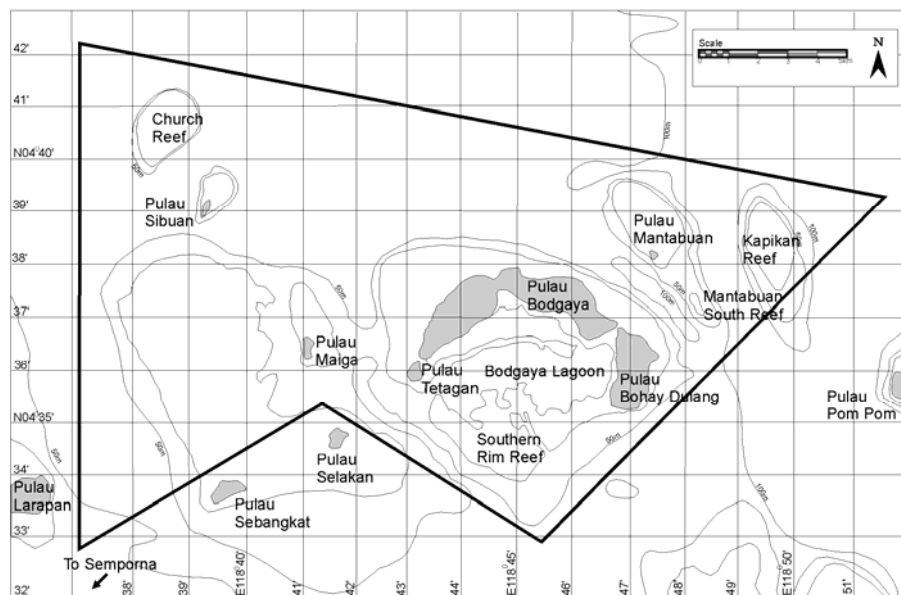


Figure 73. Park boundary as proposed in 1992

Kapikan reef has unique features and it has been agreed that the 1992 boundary needs to be re-aligned so that the whole of this important reef system is included.

Pu. Selakan and Pu Sebangkat were excluded from the first proposal put forward in 1977, but included in the recommendation for the park in Wood (1981). The 1992 proposal included a larger section of the Sebangkat-Selakan reef than in 1977, but the two islands and the reef immediately to the south were still excluded (Fig 73). The reasons for not including these two islands in the 1992 proposal are assumed to be as follows:

- a) Large numbers of people living on the islands
- b) Anticipated problems associated with land claims and customary rights
- c) Significant alteration to the natural environment considered incompatible with Park status.

6.4. ZONING

Zoning is an accepted tool in park management and its application is recommended for the Semporna Islands Park. Zoning recognises that different areas within the park may have different needs, and that some activities have to be separated from each other to avoid conflict. For example, extractive use of resources is not appropriate in pristine areas of high conservation value, just as recreational boat use is incompatible with areas where seaweed cultivation is being carried out.

The zones have been selected in order to help meet the management objectives as outlined in 6.2. The zones and boundaries that have been recommended are based on current understanding of the ecology of the area, its conservation needs and the opportunities and threats associated with different activities.

Feasibility has also been taken into consideration in selecting the zones since the proposals will be of no value if they are unworkable in practice. As with other elements of the plan, the effectiveness of the zoning scheme should be assessed at intervals and modifications made as necessary to ensure it is achieving its aims.

Zoning is discussed in more detail in the next section of this plan, and recommendations made in relation to conservation of biodiversity (part 7), sustainable use (part 8) and recreation (part 9). The regulations and boundaries for each zone are in part 10.