

Havoc in paradise: a reflection on indonesian coral reef damage in raja ampat

Opinion

It has been more than two weeks passed since Saturday, March 4th, 2017 when Indonesian faced an appalling tragedy on its marine biodiversity history. A cruise ship named MV Caledonian Sky operated by British tourism agent, Noble Caledonia, has been ran aground in the waters around Kri Island, Raja Ampat archipelago and led to alarming destruction on its coral reef ecosystem. The cruise ship which weighs 4,290tons known to bring around 102 passengers and 79 crew en route from Papua New Guinea to Philippines and scheduled to arrive in Manila on 14th March. Later known that the Bahamas-flagged cruise foundered likely due to human error after bird watching activities at Waigeo Island.

When all passengers reportedly survived the incident, further investigation held by cross-ministerial team and Spica Insurances (an insurance company that underwrite MV Caledonian Sky) agreed there were up to 18,882square meters damaged area consists of 13,270square meters heavily damaged and 5,612square meters moderately damaged area according to the Deputy for Maritime sovereignty at the Office of the Coordinating Maritime Affairs Minister, Arif Havas, in its press statement on Tuesday (21/3). Until recently, there has not yet exact amount of compensation reported. Though if we include possibility of later biodiversity losses and collateral damages to economical, social, and tourism potential, this incident is undeniably priceless and can never be able to compensated.

As one of Indonesia's national park and heart of coral reef triangle that contains vast amount of biodiversity, Raja Ampat archipelago had became a global tourist destination for maritime tourism. Based on an ecological study led by The Nature Conservancy (TNC) in 2002, Raja Ampat archipelago is home to about 537 species (even up to 553 species in 2007 according to World Wild Foundation) of coral including members of the genus Acropora, Porites, Montipora, and Stylophora. Compared to Caribbean islands in Central America and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park in Australia which is very well known, both regions have only about 400 species of coral. That being said, number of coral reef species in Raja Ampat archipelago is the world's coral diversity bull's eye. It reached in total 75% of all coral species ever found in the world.

There are a lot of benefits given by coral reefs to marine ecosystem as well as humanity. Mainly as a natural barrier to protect coastal area from the onslaught of sea waves, it also has a role as various coral fish habitat, natural food source, and source of natural pharmaceuticals. It also provides spectacular underwater view, which is why besides Raja Ampat, several locations in Indonesia that has enormous number of coral reef species such as Nusa Penida island (Bali), Komodo island (NTT), Bunaken island (North Sulawesi), Derawan island (East Kalimantan), Wakatobi islands (North Sulawesi) and Cenderawasih bay (Papua) became favorite destination for marine tourism.

The Coral Triangle itself is the epicentre for the biodiversity of not only corals and fishes, but many other marine organisms as well. It even provides habitat to six out of the world's seven marine turtle

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species. Main area of coral reef triangle that stretch from Indonesia, Philippines, Malaysia, Timor Leste, Papua New Guinea, dan Solomon Islands estimated to be around 75,000km² and Indonesia own about 51,000km² of it. With those numbers, Indonesia accounted for 18% of total world's coral reefs and 65% of the total area in the coral triangle.

The incident resulted in the destruction of habitats of coral reef ecosystem might drastically reduce and even eliminate several biodiversity on Raja Ampat archipelago as it is the heart of world's coral reef triangle. Given the importance and value of coral reef especially those in the Raja Ampat archipelago, initial recommendation given by evaluation team towards Spica Insurance to pay compensation of US \$800-1200per square meters, or a total of US \$1.28 to 1.92million (14/3) deemed insufficient to pay for the ecological losses due to damaged coral reef ecosystem. Indonesia Biology Consortium (Kobi), which had held 2017's National Coordination Meeting (Rakornas) on 20-21 March 2017 suggest and urge the Indonesian Government not only to urgently address this incident seriously and sincerely, but also set it as one of the national maritime ecological tragedy. Noble Caledonia must held full responsibility and proved its 'nobility' by fulfilling remarks to cooperate with Indonesia's government. It shall continue to assist the recovery of reefs in the region until its ecosystem has naturally functioning again. The Indonesian government, in this case Ministry of Environment and Forests (MEF) and Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (MMAF) also should immediately held large scale and extensive evaluation of marine resources and conservation by gathering marine ecology experts from Indonesia. They shall intervene and play an active role to initiate, monitor, and look after the restoration by facilitating intense and effective communication between all involved parties.

Kobi assess this incident is not only related to the sovereignty of the Indonesian nation towards conservation of marine biological resources, but furthermore this incident should be a bitter and priceless lesson to Indonesian people so that similar incidents will never repeated again in the future.

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Conflict of interest

Author declares that there is no conflict of interest.