

WWF International Corals Initiative

Flores Banda marine ecoregion

Geographic location: Indonesia

Background

Indonesia has more coral reefs than any other country, many of which are found in the Flores-Banda Seas. The Flores-Banda marine ecoregion stretches from the Java Sea in the west to the shallow Arafura Shelf in the east (see map). It is bounded by the Pacific Ocean to the North and the Indian Ocean to the South and marks the only deep-water tropical connection between the Pacific and Indian Oceans. In this strategic location, it provides feeding, breeding, and migration routes for a number of turtle species, cetaceans, and commercially important fisheries.

Hosting more than 2,000 marine fish species and over 80 genera of corals, as well as proving an Indo-Pacific Corridor for marine mammals, this ecoregion is part of the most complex and biodiverse marine environment in the world. Tropical shallow cross-shelves support a variety of mangroves, sea grasses, estuary, lagoon, patch reef, and barrier reef ecosystems, while deep ocean basins and oceanic islands provide for atoll, fringing and barrier reef development.

Special features include the Lesser Sunda Islands which form a series of bio geographic stepping stones, bridging Wallace's Line and connecting the Australasian fauna of Eastern Indonesia and Papua New Guinea with the Eurasian fauna of Sumatra and the SE Asian mainland. Other globally unique elements are:

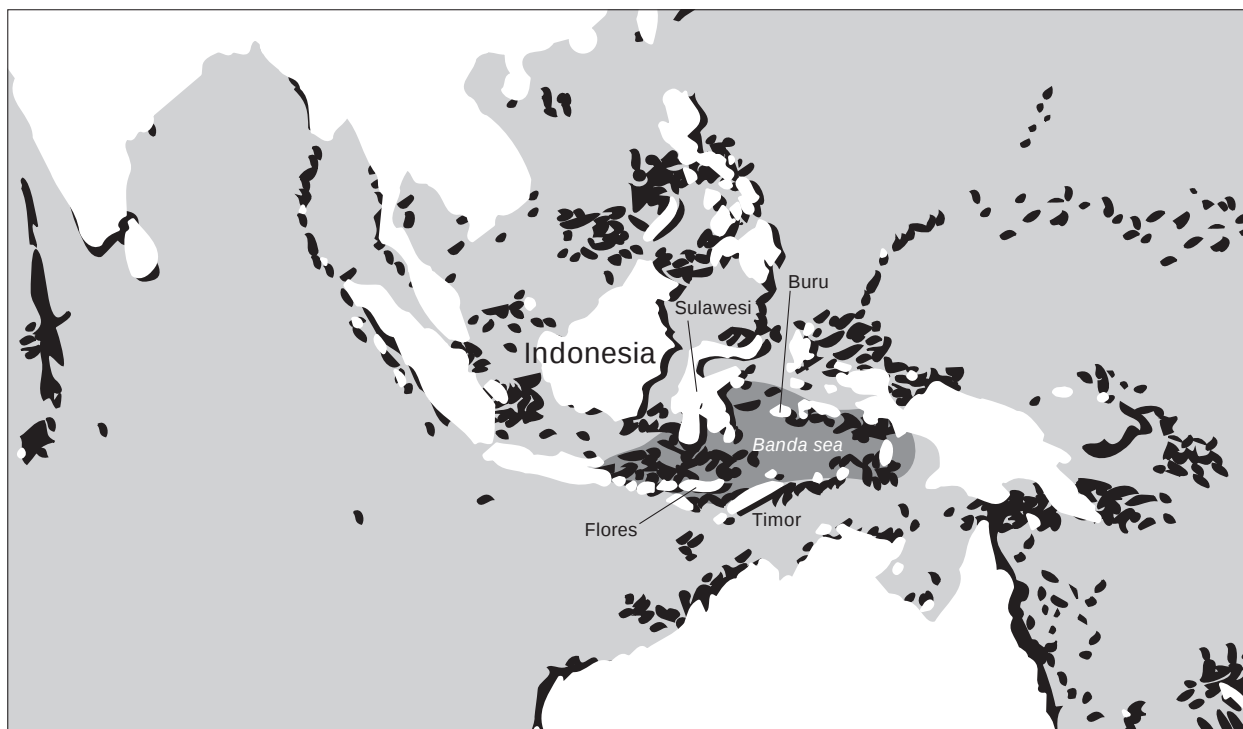
- the shallow sea grass beds of the Arafura Sea,
- the Aru Islands,
- the uplifted atoll complex of Take Bone Rate,
- the Sunda Shelf Barrier,
- exceptionally high numbers of endemic corals in the Togian Islands and Tukang Besi Islands (known as Wakatobi Marine Park),

People and the reefs

Indonesia's population of over 220 million people is concentrated in the coastal zone, with shallow marine reef habitats providing food security and livelihoods for millions of coastal communities. Although government agencies focus on oceanic fisheries, traditional coastal and reef fisheries account for 85-90% of the total marine catch effort, with 90% of the catch being consumed domestically. About two-thirds of animal protein consumed in Indonesia comes from fisheries. Economic well-being, social fabric and health indicators in coastal communities are therefore intimately linked to tropical coastal ecosystem health.

Yet at this moment, more than four fifths of Indonesia's reefs are considered to be highly or moderately threatened through human activities. While many threats may appear to be direct impacts, visible in the field, they are in fact rooted in institutional and policy issues that influence behavior and the management and regulation of reef resources.

Key threats to the reefs in the Flores-Banda region include destructive fishing by local populations, overexploitation of coastal and marine fisheries for local and export markets, pollution from urban centers, and coastal development. Despite the presence of customary marine tenure at the level of many villages, the marine systems are showing increasing signs of overexploitation. This region was also hard hit by coral bleaching in 1998, although the complex oceanography and strong currents in many places may have helped many reefs survive.



It has been calculated that degraded reefs in areas of dense population cost Indonesian society up to US\$ 500,000 / km² over a 25 year time span, due to lost coastal protection and tourism functions, as well as immense social costs.

WWF and conservation activity

Indonesia has an extensive, well-planned network of marine protected areas (MPAs), including 33 designated sites in the Flores-Banda ecoregion. The problem is that most are paper parks, where habitat destructive practices are widespread, and where management is weak. As the major conservation NGO in Indonesia, WWF is well positioned to support local stakeholders in tackling this challenge.

WWF opened a regional office in Bali in 1998 to launch an expanded program of marine activities and become the center for WWF-Indonesia's national marine program, focusing on marine protected areas and fisheries work. The program includes an annual national Reef Check program to build capacity among local groups to carry out reef monitoring, an expanded turtle conservation program, and more site-based conservation work focused on coral reef conservation and community fisheries.

WWF is actively involved in management of Wakatobi, Bali Barat, Riung in East Flores and Ujung Kulon National Parks, as well as in many of the smaller sites. Efforts range from protecting critical turtle nesting sites through patrolling and enforcement to engaging communities in community based management initiatives focused around a number of issues such as the aquarium trade, eco-tourism related to turtles, and community based reef fisheries. This includes campaign activities for whale conservation, such as the development of a whale stranding monitoring network that provides practical guidelines for handling the stranded cetaceans.

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