

**News/Philippines****Devastating oil spill**

*The oil spill from the ship of the Sunshine Maritime Development Corporation (SMDC), which sank on 11 August, south of Guimaras, as it was transporting more than 2 mn litres of bunker oil for the Petron Corporation, is devastating the livelihood of thousands of fisherfolk*

**This write-up is from the website of Kilusang Mangingisda, a coalition of five national fisherfolk federations in the Philippines (<http://www.fisherfolkmovement.org/>)**

The oil spill that recently occurred off the coast of Guimaras will destroy and affect the livelihoods of some 8,000 fisherfolk living in the coastal fishing communities of Nueva Valencia, Jordan and Buenavista and several islands off the coast of Guimaras Island, according to Kilusang Mangingisda chair, Ruperto Aleroza.

“It is with sadness and rage that we heard the news that an oil spill occurred in the Visayan region last week. No amount of dole-outs and financial contributions will make up for the devastation that the oil spill has wrought, and its effects will be felt in the loss of livelihoods and the displacement of thousands of fisherfolk living in the coastal communities,” he said.

The oil spill has also affected the other coastal towns of Villadolid, Bago City, Pontevedra and Hinigaran in Negros province, and will further threaten the coastal towns of Oton, Tigbauan, Guimbal, Leganes, Zarraga and Dumangas in Panay. Likewise, the spill could also affect the northern coastal towns of Enrique, Manapla and Victorias in Negros, and Barotac Nuevo and Banate in Panay because of the proximity of the spill to some of the richest mangrove areas in the Visayas.

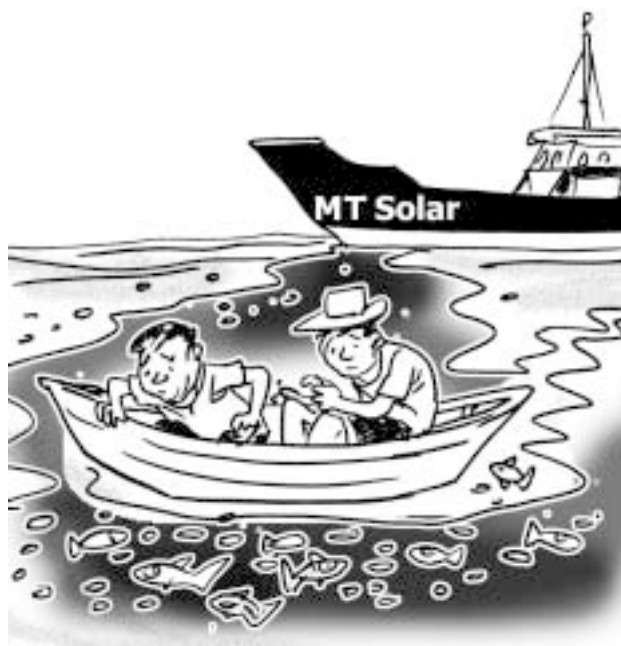
The oil spill, the second to hit the country in a year, could cause massive pollution in violation of Republic Act No. 9275 or the Clean Water Act. The oil tanker chartered by Petron, *M/T Solar I*, was

carrying 2.4 mn litres of oil when it sank off the coast of Guimaras.

Apart from the severe ecological damage, the spill could threaten the economy of Guimaras, which was once one of the poorest provinces in the Visayas. “Fishing is the major source of livelihood for the people of Guimaras, which was recently taken out of the list of the poorest provinces by the National Statistical Co-ordination Board (NSCB) because of the resurgence of its local economy and tourism. Now the province would go back to being a backwater region once again because of the damage wrought by the spill,” lamented Aleroza.

Data from the Bureau of Agricultural Statistics (BAS) cites Iloilo City as having the highest municipal marine production at 67,885 tonnes annually, followed by Negros Occidental province, with 35,260 tonnes, and Guimaras, with 3,266 tonnes in 2005. Fisher leaders from Kilusang Mangingisda fear the daily fish catch in municipal fishing will suffer a drastic drop in figures as the region braces itself for the ill effects that the oil spill has wrought.

Kilusang Mangingisda would send a team to Guimaras to conduct a study on the gravity of the damage as well as to get video footage, and talk with local partner fisherfolk organizations in the area. The group is also studying the possibility of filing damages against



Petron for the economic and ecological destruction it has caused to the thousands of fisherfolk in Guimaras, once it concludes its fact-finding report.

“The rich biodiversity of the Visayan Strait was severely compromised by the laxity of laws by the national government and equally, by the wanton disregard of shipping regulations by huge corporations like Petron. The consequence is wholesale devastation of mangrove and marine resources. Surely the answer shouldn’t be the thousands of fisherfolk commissioned by Petron to clean up the spill in coastal communities. For a fisherfolk community, there is nothing more difficult than to leave their traditional fishing ground,” said Aleroza.

Added Aleroza: “Ultimately, the real losers in all of this will be the lowly fishermen struggling mightily to contain the spill. They work until sundown scooping up the gooey sludge that the vessel caused. They will go home with just enough money in hand to feed their families and survive the day but not for long. No one addresses the long-term economic damage to the thousands of fisherfolk and their families living in coastal communities in the Visayas.”