

## STRATEGY OF THE INDONESIAN CONSULATE GENERAL IN DAVAO CITY TO PROMOTE TRADE RELATIONS BETWEEN THE SANGIHE ISLANDS AND GENERAL SANTOS CITY IN THE TUNA FISHING SECTOR

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### ABSTRACT

*The tuna fisheries sector plays a crucial role in regional economic development and is a strategic commodity in Indonesia's maritime diplomacy. However, despite the geographical proximity between the Sangihe Islands in Indonesia and General Santos City in the southern Philippines, formal trade cooperation in the tuna sector was not realized until 2024. This study explores the strategies implemented by the Consulate General of the Republic of Indonesia in Davao City to strengthen tuna fishing trade relations between the Sangihe Islands and General Santos City. Data was collected through in-depth interviews with economic officials at the Consulate General of the Republic of Indonesia in Davao City, supported by secondary data from academic journals, official reports, and credible online sources. The findings indicate that the Consulate General of the Republic of Indonesia in Davao City has implemented comprehensive strategies as a facilitator, including document translation, facilitation of trade forums, promotional activities, and technical training on tuna handling by Philippine standards. These efforts resulted in the official export of three tons of fresh tuna from the Sangihe Islands in early 2024. In conclusion, the economic diplomacy of the Indonesian Consulate General in Davao City has played a key role in fostering sustainable trade relations and enhancing Indonesia's regional influence in Mindanao.*

*Keywords: Economic Diplomacy, General Santos City, Indonesian Consulate General in Davao City, Sangihe Islands, Tuna Fisheries.*

### ABSTRAK

Sektor perikanan tuna memainkan peran penting dalam pembangunan ekonomi regional dan merupakan komoditas strategis dalam diplomasi maritim Indonesia. Namun, terlepas dari kedekatan geografis antara Kepulauan Sangihe di Indonesia dan General Santos City di Filipina selatan, kerja sama perdagangan formal di sektor tuna baru terealisasi pada tahun 2024. Studi ini mengeksplorasi strategi yang diterapkan oleh KJRI Davao City untuk memperkuat hubungan perdagangan perikanan tuna antara Kepulauan Sangihe dan General Santos City. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam dengan pejabat ekonomi di KJRI Davao, didukung oleh data sekunder dari jurnal akademis, laporan resmi, dan sumber-sumber online yang kredibel. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa KJRI Davao City telah menerapkan strategi yang komprehensif sebagai fasilitator, termasuk penerjemahan dokumen, fasilitasi forum perdagangan, kegiatan promosi, dan pelatihan teknis penanganan tuna sesuai standar Filipina. Upaya-upaya ini menghasilkan ekspor resmi tiga ton tuna segar dari Kepulauan Sangihe pada awal tahun 2024. Sebagai kesimpulan, diplomasi ekonomi KJRI Davao City telah memainkan peran penting dalam membina hubungan perdagangan yang berkelanjutan dan meningkatkan pengaruh regional Indonesia di Mindanao.

Kata kunci: Diplomasi Ekonomi, General Santos City, KJRI Davao City, Kepulauan Sangihe, Perikanan Tuna.

### INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is an archipelago consisting of 17,508 large and small islands, with an area dominated by marine waters. Indonesia's marine area reaches around 7.9 million km<sup>2</sup>, with a coastline of 81,791 km, covering around 70% of the country's total territorial area. This condition makes the sea has a very important role in the geographical, economic, and strategic aspects of Indonesia (Farhani, 2022). As an archipelago, Indonesia shares sea

borders with ten neighboring countries, one of which is the Philippines. This border covers the area between the Sangihe Islands Regency in Indonesia and General Santos City in the Philippines, with a distance of approximately +142 nautical miles (Sumolang et al., 2023).



Figure 1 Map of Sangihe Islands and General Santos City  
 Source: Google Maps

The Sangihe Islands are between Sulawesi Island (Indonesia) and Mindanao Island (Philippines). The land area of the Sangihe Islands Regency is 736.98 km<sup>2</sup>, while its waters cover 11,126.61 km<sup>2</sup>. Sangihe waters are included in the Republic of Indonesia Fisheries Management Area (WPP-RI) 716, also known as Fisheries Management Area (FMA) 716 (Nasution et al., 2024). Based on data from the Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries, marine fisheries production in Sangihe Islands Regency is dominated by tuna, with skipjack (304.20 tons) as the highest production, followed by madi-dihang (115.90 tons), bigeye tuna (18.30 tons), albacore (11.10 tons), and southern bluefin tuna (2.00 tons) (Sompotan et al., 2022). Fish production, especially tuna, in the Sangihe Islands not only plays an important role in meeting local needs, but is also one of the main commodities for the international market. One of the main export destinations for these fishery products is General Santos City in Mindanao, Philippines (Pechon et al., 2022). Since the development of the tuna industry in General Santos in the 1970s, the city has become a major center for tuna processing and export thanks to government support, including the annual hosting of the National Tuna Congress. This reputation has made General Santos widely recognized as the "Tuna Capital of the Philippines" (Quismorio, 2023).

However, the demand for tuna in General Santos City has now outstripped its available supply. Based on market data, most suppliers depend on tuna from General Santos City as their primary source, especially after several ports in Luzon and Mindanao closed. This creates an imbalance between availability and demand, potentially leading to scarcity if not matched by sustainable resource management. The high demand for tuna in General Santos City is an opportunity for the Sangihe Islands to expand its fresh tuna trade. Recognizing this great potential, the Sangihe Islands Regency Government initiated trade cooperation efforts with companies in General Santos City. As a concrete follow-up, the initiative was forwarded by one of the cooperatives in the Sangihe Islands, the Maming Cooperative. Maming Cooperative communicated with Glaukos Trading Corporation in General Santos City to offer cooperation in exporting fresh tuna. This also marked the first time that Sangihe was officially involved in international trade, which required support in various aspects.

One of the main reasons for illegal tuna trade from the Sangihe Islands to General Santos City has been the complexity and large number of documents required to meet official export requirements. The difficulty in obtaining these documents has led many fishermen and business operators to continue using illegal channels to maintain their trade. Until 2024, tuna trade between the Sangihe Islands and General Santos City continued

illegally. In realizing official international trade, the cooperative representing tuna fishermen in the Sangihe Islands faces significant challenges, particularly regarding tuna quality standards that meet the market's requirements in General Santos City. Tuna from Sangihe has good quality, but improper management and storage, such as inadequate cold storage standards and temperature control, cause the fish to fail to meet export standards. Lack of education is also one of the main challenges for fishermen in Sangihe. Cooperative administrators and fishermen have not received adequate training on managing fresh tuna to meet export standards. This issue is exacerbated by a lack of understanding of international trade regulations. Cooperatives and tuna fishermen in the Sangihe Islands do not understand export documentation requirements due to language barriers hindering official trade between the two regions.

In addressing these challenges, the Consulate General of the Republic of Indonesia (KJRI) in Davao City can play a crucial role in guiding and supporting the establishment of organized official trade. Therefore, this study aims to understand the economic diplomacy strategies implemented by the Indonesian government through the Consulate General of the Republic of Indonesia (KJRI) in Davao City, particularly in strengthening bilateral relations with the southern Philippines. By serving as the primary facilitator in legal tuna trade between the Sangihe Islands and General Santos City, the Consulate General of the Republic of Indonesia (KJRI) in Davao City will create broader international market access for Indonesian fishermen and support regional economic growth in both countries.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The journal used as a reference in this study is a scientific journal written by Anta Maulana Nasution, Viga Ananda Wicaksono, Intan Adhi Perdana Putri, Awani Irewati, and Imam Prakoso entitled "Opportunity to Export Fish Directly from the Outermost Islands of Indonesia: Exploring Value Chain and Power Dynamics in Fisheries." This study examines the dynamics of the value chain in the fisheries sector in the outermost islands of Indonesia, namely the Sangihe and Talaud Islands. The study was conducted using a qualitative approach through interviews, field observations, and group discussions with local fishermen, local government officials, and business actors. The primary focus of this journal is to identify the obstacles in realizing direct exports of fishery products, particularly tuna, from Indonesia's border regions directly to General Santos City, the Philippines, without passing through transit points such as Bitung or Surabaya. The journal explains that the main obstacles to realizing direct exports include limitations in maritime transportation infrastructure, cold storage facilities, the capacity of Fish Processing Units (FPUs), and overlapping authority between the central and local governments, which are the primary challenges in realizing direct exports of fishery products, particularly tuna, to General Santos City, the Philippines.

However, this journal has not discussed the role of diplomatic institutions, particularly the Indonesian Consulate General (KJRI) in Davao City, in supporting bilateral economic cooperation in the fisheries sector. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by examining in depth how the economic diplomacy strategies implemented by the Consulate General of the Republic of Indonesia (KJRI) in Davao City can strengthen trade relations between Indonesia and Southern Philippines, particularly in the tuna fisheries sector. Thus, this study can contribute to broadening the understanding of the role of diplomatic institutions in supporting regional economic development through economic diplomacy.

### **Economic Diplomacy**

In the book titled *"Conceptualizing Economic Diplomacy: The Crossroads of International Relations, Economics, IPE and Diplomatic Studies"* by Maaikje Okano-Heijmans, economic diplomacy is defined as the use of political instruments in international negotiations to improve a country's welfare and economic growth. In addition, economic diplomacy also relies on various economic instruments to maintain national political stability. Economic diplomacy generally aims to gain market access, increase trade volume, reduce tariff barriers, and open up investment opportunities. With these objectives, economic



diplomacy is not only limited to institutions that focus on foreign affairs, but also has close links with domestic institutions (Poerwantika & Kotwhani, 2019). Economic diplomacy works through various instruments that support a country's trade and investment growth. One of these instruments is the government's contribution to opening market access for business actors through trade negotiations, in which countries establish bilateral or multilateral trade agreements to reduce tariff and non-tariff barriers, thereby broadening market access for domestic products. These agreements may include free trade agreements (FTAs), comprehensive economic partnerships, and cooperation in international economic forums such as ASEAN, G-20, and the World Trade Organization (WTO) (Sahputri & Ibrahim, 2023).

In this study, the author will investigate the economic diplomacy strategies implemented by the Consulate General of the Republic of Indonesia (KJRI) in Davao City to promote trade relations between the Sangihe Islands and General Santos City in the tuna fishing sector. In this case, the implementation of economic diplomacy theory is influenced by various factors, including the role of diplomatic representatives in facilitating trade cooperation, overcoming administrative barriers, and supporting product promotion. These factors reflect how economic diplomacy can strategically increase exports and strengthen cross-border trade relations. Thus, the strategies implemented by the Indonesian Consulate General (KJRI) in Davao City not only contribute to the enhancement of bilateral trade but also demonstrate how economic diplomacy can play a role in promoting the growth of MSMEs, particularly in the tuna fishing sector in the Sangihe Islands, through improved market access and support for small and medium-sized enterprises.

## METHODS

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach to examine the strategies of the Indonesian Consulate General (KJRI) in Davao City in promoting trade relations between the Sangihe Islands and General Santos City, particularly in the tuna fishing sector. Primary data will be obtained through in-depth interviews during the author's 2.5-month internship at the Indonesian Consulate General (KJRI) in Davao City. Interviews will be conducted with the head of the economic section responsible for the Indonesian Consulate General's area of jurisdiction in Davao City, specifically Mindanao, to obtain information related to strategies, work programs, and the impact of economic diplomacy on bilateral trade. Meanwhile, secondary data will include scientific journals, news on the Indonesian Consulate General (KJRI) in Davao City website, official reports from the Indonesian Consulate General (KJRI) in Davao City, and data from reliable sources on the internet. This study is expected to contribute to understanding the role of economic diplomacy by the Consulate General of the Republic of Indonesia (KJRI) in Davao City in promoting trade relations between the Sangihe Islands and General Santos City in the tuna fishing sector.

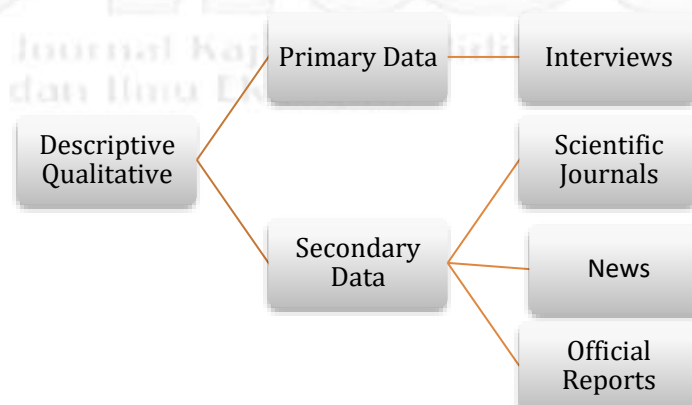


Figure 2 Research Methods

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Initiation of Tuna Exports from Sangihe Islands to General Santos City**

The export of fresh tuna from the Sangihe Islands to General Santos City began in 2019. General Santos City was chosen as a strategic export destination due to its international port and processing facilities, such as the General Santos Fish Port Complex (GSFPC), which the European Union, Japan, and the United States have recognized. As the center of the Philippine tuna industry, the city facilitates most of the country's exports of fresh and frozen tuna to global markets, supported by five large canning plants and various other processing facilities. Its proximity to Indonesia and reputation as the "Tuna Capital" makes General Santos a potential partner for expanding market access and increasing the value of tuna exports from the Sangihe Islands.

This export initiative began with a working visit by the Regent of Sangihe to General Santos to meet with local government officials and business leaders. The focus of the visit was to explore opportunities for cooperation in the fisheries sector (Nasution et al., 2024). Previously, the Sangihe Islands Regency Government received a letter from the Consulate General of the Republic of Indonesia (KJRI) in Davao City on July 16, 2019, numbered 622/PK/7/2019/01, informing about business cooperation opportunities and a Sister City agreement between the Sangihe Islands and General Santos City. The Regent hopes that this visit will have a positive impact on the economic development of the Sangihe Islands (Mendalora, 2019). During the meeting, the Sangihe Islands Regency Government discussed opportunities for cooperation in the fisheries, tourism, and agriculture sectors with the government and business actors of General Santos City, with support from the Indonesian Consulate General (KJRI) in Davao City. One of the discussion's main focuses was promoting tuna trade initiatives. Following the visit, communication between the Indonesian Consulate General (KJRI) in Davao City, the Sangihe Islands, and General Santos City continued through correspondence. However, this initiative was halted due to the COVID-19 pandemic that struck in early 2020 (Nasution et al., 2024).

Efforts to revive the export plan began around 2021, when the Indonesian Consulate General (KJRI) in Davao City sent a letter to the Sangihe Islands Regency Government stating that the General Santos Fish Port Complex (GSFPC) Authority was ready to receive fresh and frozen tuna imports from Indonesia for distribution to canning factories, provided that all export documents from the country of origin were fulfilled (Nasution et al., 2024). At that time, many fisheries cooperatives and fishermen in the Sangihe Islands were on the verge of giving up due to language barriers and the numerous administrative requirements that needed to be fulfilled to realize the exports. They initially believed that the export process would be similar to domestic trade, thus requiring further guidance the Consulate General of the Republic of Indonesia (KJRI) in Davao City.

Since 2021, efforts to initiate Sangihe tuna exports have continued through 2022 and 2023, despite various challenges, including regulatory differences, technical limitations, and difficulties in preparing the required documents. On August 31, 2023, support for this export initiative grew stronger when the Indonesian Consulate General (KJRI) in Davao City attended the 23rd National Tuna Congress in General Santos City as a guest of honor. In his remarks, the Consul General emphasized the importance of tuna as a strategic resource for Indonesia, particularly from North Sulawesi, and committed to strengthening trade ties between Indonesia, General Santos City, and Mindanao (KJRI Davao City, 2023a). On September 8, 2023, the Consulate General of the Republic of Indonesia (KJRI) in Davao City held an online meeting with the Sangihe Islands Regency Government to discuss the requirements for tuna exports from the Sangihe Islands to General Santos. During the meeting, both parties agreed to strengthen coordination to understand better the export regulations to the General Santos City International Fish Port. This meeting represents a concrete step in supporting Indonesia's economic diplomacy, particularly in promoting the

realization of tuna exports from the Sangihe Islands and achieving official trade by 2024 (KJRI Davao City, 2023b).

### **The strategy by The Indonesian Consulate General (KJRI) in Davao City**

The strategy implemented by the Indonesian Consulate General (KJRI) in Davao City is to play a crucial role in facilitating the official initiation of fresh tuna trade from the Sangihe Islands to General Santos City, which was finally realized in 2024. One of the main challenges faced by local businesses was the lack of understanding of the language and terminology used in international export documents. This made it difficult for them to meet regulatory and administrative requirements in cross-border trade. In response, the Indonesian Consulate General (KJRI) in Davao City has taken strategic steps by providing translation services for export documents into Indonesian. This support enables businesses and cooperatives in the Sangihe Islands to understand better and complete the various documents required for exports to General Santos City, such as permits, health certificates, and other documents that must be prepared with precision and accuracy.

The Indonesian Consulate General (KJRI) in Davao City also assisted in educating local businesses about applicable procedures and regulations, ensuring they can meet the requirements set by Philippine authorities. To provide local businesses with a more in-depth understanding of procedures and regulations, the Indonesian Consulate General (KJRI) in Davao City has compiled a booklet titled “Tuna Import Guide: From Indonesia to the Tuna Capital of the Philippines,” which contains essential trade procedures and has been translated into Indonesian.

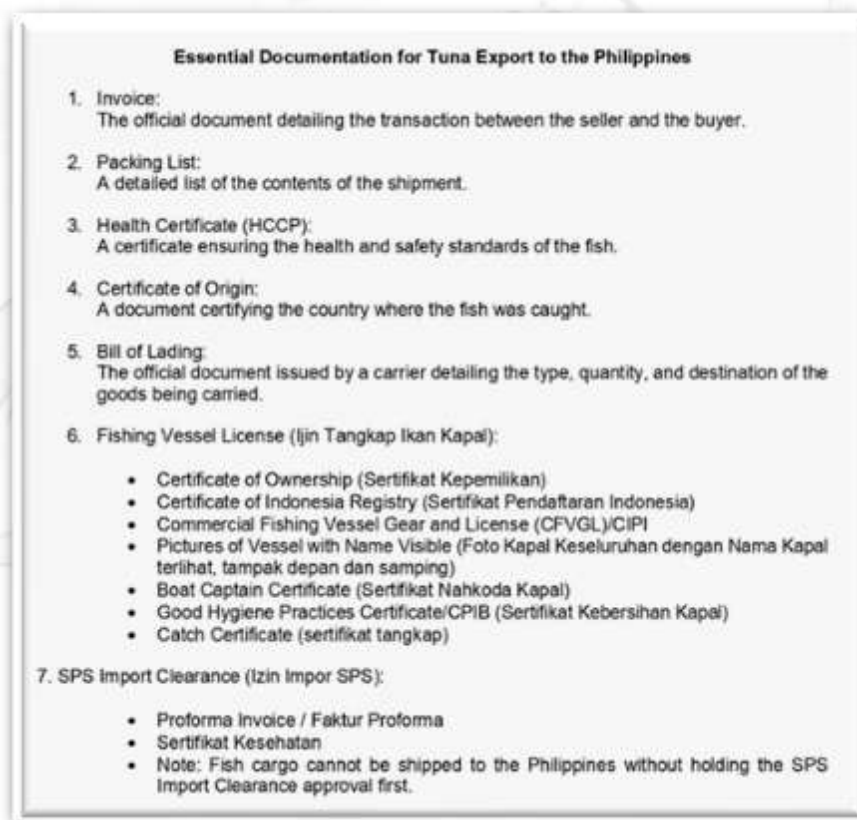


Figure 3 Essential Documentation for Tuna Export

Source: “Tuna Import Guide: From Indonesia to the Tuna Capital of the Philippines” by the Consulate General of the Republic of Indonesia (KJRI) in Davao City

In addition to difficulties in understanding export documents, many businesses in the Sangihe Islands are confused by various other regulations, particularly regarding the quality



standards for tuna required by the Philippine market. To address this issue, the Consulate General of the Republic of Indonesia (KJRI) in Davao City held a series of online meetings via Zoom Meeting, which enabled representatives from the Sangihe Islands to discuss several topics, including the regulation of fish storage temperatures on ships, which is one of the main obstacles. Although fishing vessels in the Sangihe Islands are already equipped with adequate storage facilities, there is still a need to ensure proper storage temperatures to meet the quality standards set by the market in General Santos City.

The Indonesian Consulate General (KJRI) in Davao City also facilitated various negotiations related to fish quality standards, including the crucial shipping time. Businesses in the Sangihe Islands face the challenge of meeting the Grade A tuna standards desired by the Philippine market within a short time frame. This process requires close coordination, with the Indonesian Consulate General (KJRI) in Davao City ensuring that shipments are made on time so that the fish remains fresh and meets the established quality standards. During the forum, the Indonesian Consulate General (KJRI) in Davao City also accommodated other negotiations regarding whether vessels with whole storage space without special cold storage could still be accepted, if shipments are made as soon as possible within two weeks. After discussions and negotiations, the first official trade between the Sangihe Islands and General Santos City occurred in late January 2024. The first Indonesian vessel, KM Nelayan 2016-5, transported approximately 3 tons of fresh tuna and became the first shipment from Tahuna Port in the Sangihe Islands to General Santos City (Perez, 2024).

Then, on February 22-23, 2024, the Indonesian Consulate General (KJRI) in Davao City held a training session titled "Tuna Handling: A Sharing Lesson Learned and Technical Excellence" to support the development of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in the fisheries sector, particularly in the Sangihe Islands. This training marks an essential step following the successful first export of fresh tuna from Sangihe to General Santos in January 2024. The event was opened by Harya K. Sidharta, Acting Consul General of the Indonesian Consulate General (KJRI) in Davao City, who explained the purpose of the training to help MSMEs understand the standards and regulations for tuna exports and imports in the Philippines. Additionally, the Consulate General of the Republic of Indonesia (KJRI) in Davao City provided full support by facilitating two participants from the Sangihe Islands to directly engage in General Santos City, enabling them to learn firsthand the proper management and handling of tuna by Philippine standards (KJRI Davao City, 2024a).



Figure 4 Training Session of Tuna Handling  
 Source: KJRI Davao City

The training featured three expert speakers from various sectors who presented material on tuna handling on board, fish import regulations in the Philippines, and aspects of food safety and tuna quality. In addition to the theoretical material, the activity continued with a field visit to the General Santos fish port to see firsthand the process of loading,

unloading, grading, and classification of tuna. Through this training, the participants from the Sangihe Islands have gained an understanding of the various procedures that must be followed, from the equipment used in the storage process to the required export documents (KJRI Davao City, 2024a). The training activities also showed that the Indonesian representative government in Davao City is responsible for improving the Community's welfare by equipping fishermen and entrepreneurs in the Sangihe Islands with such knowledge and skills.

Another strategy carried out by the Consulate General of the Republic of Indonesia (KJRI) in Davao City as a facilitator in this tuna trade is to promote Indonesian tuna products, including those from the Sangihe Islands. One type of promotional activity is conducting working visits. the Consulate General of the Republic of Indonesia (KJRI) in Davao City had a working visit to General Santos City in November 2024. The visit aimed to expand the Indonesian tuna market in the Philippines by strengthening business cooperation and economic diplomacy. During the agenda, the Consulate General of the Republic of Indonesia (KJRI) in Davao City held a meeting with the Port Manager of the Philippine Fisheries Development Authority (PFDA) at the General Santos City Fish Port Complex (GSCFPC), visited Philbest Canning Corporation, and discussed with Glaukos Trading Corporation, which at that time was conducting a tuna trade agreement from the Sangihe Islands (KJRI Davao City, 2024b). Apart from working visits, the Consulate General of the Republic of Indonesia (KJRI) in Davao City also actively promoted Indonesian tuna products at other significant events, such as the 23rd National Tuna Congress in General Santos City. At the event, the Consulate General of the Republic of Indonesia (KJRI) in Davao City was the guest of honour and had the opportunity to meet with government officials and business people in General Santos City while conveying Indonesia's commitment to strengthening trade relations.



Figure 5 The participation of KJRI Davao City in the 23rd National Tuna Congress.  
Source: KJRI Davao City

As the primary facilitator of fresh tuna exports from the Sangihe Islands to General Santos City, the Consulate General of the Republic of Indonesia (KJRI) in Davao City has actively implemented its economic diplomacy strategy. Through its active presence as a bridge between foreign policy and market practices on the ground, economic diplomacy is realized through concrete cooperation that opens new trade routes between two geographical areas that previously had no structured formal trade relations. In terms of impact, this strategy has contributed to strengthening bilateral trade relations between the regions. the Consulate General of the Republic of Indonesia (KJRI) in Davao City has also successfully empowered MSMEs in the Sangihe Islands by helping them meet export requirements. One of the concrete initiatives was supporting the Maming Cooperative in carrying out its first export shipment of fresh tuna to General Santos City in January 2024. In this process, the Consulate General of the Republic of Indonesia (KJRI) in Davao City provided technical assistance and facilitated communication and coordination between Sangihe businesses and partners in Mindanao, including Glaukos Trading Corporation as



the importer. These efforts offer significant opportunities for Sangihe MSMEs to engage in international trade and accelerate adaptation to global standards while boosting the competitiveness of Eastern Indonesia's fishery products in the global market.

As part of efforts to encourage continued exports, on February 4, 2025, the Consulate General of the Republic of Indonesia (KJRI) in Davao City met with Maming Cooperative's trading partner, Glaukos Trading Corporation, to discuss plans for a second shipment of fresh tuna. This shipment includes 5 tons of tuna from Sangihe Islands and 5 tons from Manado, following the success of the first export in January 2024, which reached 3 tons. This plan reflects the commitment of the Consulate General of the Republic of Indonesia (KJRI) in Davao City to strengthen economic relations between Indonesia and the Southern Philippines, support the expansion of MSMEs, and open new market opportunities. The meeting also discussed cooperation in the tourism and agriculture sectors and the possibility of reviving the twin city partnership between General Santos and Bitung, which could strengthen bilateral relations and support regional economic development (KJRI Davao City, 2025).



Figure 6 KJRI Davao City's meeting with Glaukos Trading Cooperation  
Source: KJRI Davao City

## CONCLUSION

This research highlights the strategic role of the Indonesian Consulate General in Davao City as a facilitator of economic diplomacy in promoting trade relations between the Consulate General of the Republic of Indonesia (KJRI) in Davao City, particularly in the tuna fisheries sector. the Consulate General of the Republic of Indonesia (KJRI) in Davao City acts as a diplomatic representative and an active liaison between the local government, local cooperatives, and private sector stakeholders. One concrete example of the success of this strategy is the realization of the first official export of three tons of fresh tuna by KM Nelayan 2016-5 from the Sangihe Islands to General Santos City in early 2024 after the previous initiation plan was stalled due to the pandemic.

Cooperatives in the Sangihe Islands are beginning to show potential in export management, with a basic understanding established through various trainings related to supply chains, logistics, and product quality. However, operational management capacity must be improved, especially in maintaining quality consistency, product packaging, and readiness to respond to international trade challenges. It is essential to instill the mindset that exporting is not just about sending products overseas but also demands a commitment to sustainable quality to retain the market. To support this, further training, technical assistance, and financing access are necessary. Local governments are also expected to play an active role in fostering cooperative management on an ongoing basis so that cooperatives are better prepared institutionally and financially. The government support is a key in strengthening the cooperative's capacity and maintaining the sustainability of the tuna trade between Sangihe Islands and General Santos City.

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