

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

DATE : 30 NOV 2016

DAY : Wednesday

DENR

IN THE NEWS

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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

PROPER IMPLEMENTATION IS NEEDED, NOT ALTERNATIVE MINING BILLS

Atty. Lysander Castillo

There is a general recognition that mining is a necessary component of economic growth in the Philippines.

Since the 1970s, mining has been regarded as a potential driver of economic development. Demands of a fast growing population, within the context of development, require natural resource extraction and utilization. Many mineral-rich areas,

however, are also environmentally valuable. Thus, the contest between the economic return of mining and the benefit of preserving an area for environmental protection is ever-present, and often controversial. Despite the significant disturbance that mining creates, there should be a general agreement that, done responsibly, mining can produce net economic and social benefits. The paramount question therefore is: Do we need new laws to ensure mining is done responsibly?

As a background, Republic Act No. 7942 or the Philippine Mining Act was enacted in 1995. In that same year, the mining law's constitutionality was challenged before the Supreme Court. It took the High Court almost a decade to decide in favor of upholding the validity of the Mining Act in 2004 after a motion for reconsideration. Subsequently, Executive Order (EO) No. 79, which suspends the granting of new mining permits, was issued in 2012. EO 79 still survives amidst the intensified

Despite the existence of relevant laws, environmental destruction, human rights violations, and economic stagnation in mining continue to exist only because such laws are not properly enforced.

mining audits conducted by the present administration.

Notwithstanding the fact that the Mining Act of 1995 has been just in operation for less than eight years, calls to scrap the existing law have been ringing in the public arena. In particular, several proposals that will replace the Mining Act have been pending in the legislative mill and referred for the consideration of the current 17th Congress.

old Mining Act that regulates an industry that has a business cycle of around 20 years? What is lacking in this governing law for a highly technical industry that has provisions for environmental protection, social development, and rehabilitation? Several concerns have been floated, but existing laws, policies or even regulations already address them.

First, there is the concern that environmental

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Proper implementations is needed, not alternative mining bills

tional Integrated Protected Areas System (NIPAS) Act, absolutely prohibits mining on old-growth or virgin forests, proclaimed watershed forest reserves, wilderness areas, mangrove forests, mossy forests, national parks, provincial/municipal forests, parks, greenbelts, game refuges and bird sanctuaries, among other critical areas.

Second, the insistence that environmental protection takes precedence in all mining activities is until now enshrined in the Philippine Environmental Impact Statement System (PEISS). Through the PEISS, protection and mitigation measures corresponding to the activity to be undertaken are put in place and subject to monitoring and evaluation.

Third, the issue of participation in the decision-making process by the community to ensure its welfare is satisfied by

not only the public consultation mechanisms in both the Local Government Code and the PEISS, but further strengthened in the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act as well.

Lastly, the objective to develop metal processing and downstream industries has always been the direction of government and development plans were crafted by government units to realize that goal.

Considering that the basic concerns are sufficiently addressed, one can only arrive at the conclusion that it is in the inadequate and sometimes outright non-implementation and non-conformance to existing applicable laws, rules and regulations that result in problems in the mining industry. This should be obvious in a country that is replete with sophisticated policies, but is still struggling to achieve economic and social development. Despite

the existence of relevant laws, environmental destruction, human rights violations, and economic stagnation in mining continue to exist only because such laws are not properly enforced.

This is not to say, however, that the Mining Act of 1995 is perfect. There is room for improvement in the transparency and dissemination of data concerning environmental programs, findings, and mineral production. Also, it is desirable to mandate the allocation of additional funds for environmental protection, the increase of waste generation fees, and some form of insurance for natural hazards.

Still, the current laws are adequate to address the balance between utilization of natural resources and protection and preservation of the environment. Clearly, the one needed right now is an implementation arrangement that can effectively monitor

and evaluate compliance of all mining activities, large scale or small scale, to existing environmental laws, rules and regulations.

Only actual use of the existing provisions of the law would allow the mining industry to determine better practices and policies. The principles of accountability and transparency require that mining corporations and government regulatory agencies be made accountable for their actions. The law allows us the opportunity to make them accountable, and only an informed, active and engaged population can make them truly accountable. It is the transformation of stakeholders into responsible ones that can pave the way for mining to be done responsibly.

ATTY. GLYSANDER CASTILLO is an Environment Fellow at the Stratbase ADR Institute and the Secretary-General of Philippine Business for Environmental Stewardship (PBEST).



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Duterte reappoints Lopez as DENR secretary

By ALEXIS ROMERO

President Duterte has reappointed Environment Secretary Gina Lopez and praised her for being strict in implementing mining regulations.

The President, however, failed to explain why Lopez's name was not included in the list of Cabinet reappointments Malacañang had sent to the Commission on Appointments (CA) for confirmation.

Lopez was one of 15 Cabinet officials who were not confirmed by the CA before Congress went on recess last month.

The absence of Lopez's name triggered speculations that she is no longer a member of the Cabinet. Duterte, however, confirmed that Lopez is still part of his team.

"By the way, I reappointed her. She was bypassed (by the CA)," Duterte said during the ceremonial switch-on of a power plant of the Palm Concepcion Power Corp. in Malacañang on Monday.

"I like her. She is okay, very strict. I like that. She is not corrupt, I like that. And cannot be corrupted. Why? Because I want my country at least relatively safe from predators of all sorts," the President added.

The environment department under Lopez has suspended 10 mining firms and has recommended the suspension of 20 others for failing to pass an environmental audit.

Meanwhile, Isabela Rep. Rodolfo Albano III yesterday said Lopez should not assume office yet.

"Obviously, her new appointment was issued while Congress is already in session. That means that it is a regular appointment, which has to be confirmed by the Commission on Appointments before the appointee can assume office," he said.

Albano, CA majority leader, said if Lopez was appointed between Oct. 22 and Nov. 6 during Congress' recess, she could immediately assume office since she received an ad interim appointment.

Albano said he is for confirming Lopez's appointment.

"I will support her. But for her own sake and for the sake of her agency, she should delay assuming office because she has a lot of enemies in the mining industry who could be waiting for her to commit a mistake so they could file a case against her. Her actions and decisions could be questioned," he said.

Alternatively, he said Lopez could wait for Congress to go on its Christmas recess middle of next month and ask the President to issue her an ad interim appointment so she could immediately assume office.

With Jess Diaz

HATAW!

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DE LIMA, INAMIN NA NAG-TEXT SA ANAK NI DAYAN

GINA LOPEZ DENR CHIEF

Ini-appoint muli ni PRES DU30 si Gina Lopez bilang Environment Secretary matapos i-bypassed ng Commission on Appointments.

Ayon kay PRES DU30 mismo, gusto niya si Lopez dahil very strict at hindi corrupt. Lalo nang hindi raw puwedeng i-corrupt si Lopez. Sa five months na pagkakaupo ni Lopez, naging responsable siya sa kampanya sa pag-audit ng mining

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PEOPLES Tonight

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By RYAN PONCE
PACAPCO

Solon supports UNDP-BIOFIN project

A CONGRESSWOMAN yesterday expressed strong support behind the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)-Biodiversity Financing Initiative (BIOFIN) Project.

Occidental Mindoro Rep. Josephine "Nene" Ramirez-Sato, a member of the House committee on ecology, said biodiversity conservation, protection and restoration part have been her advocacy even before joining the government service.

"Being born from an island province with high endemicity and cultural diversity, I understand the arduous task to preserve local culture while protecting the environment and harnessing the diversity of life," said Sato, who was among the guests during a meeting held by the UNDP led by its Country Director in the Philippines, Titon Mitra.

Sato vowed to work hand-in-hand with UNDP and BIOFIN Project to increase investments for biodiversity.



Occidental Mindoro Rep. Josephine "Nene" Ramirez-Sato

BIOFIN is a global partnership aimed at addressing the biodiversity finance challenge in a comprehensive manner.

It is designed to provide an innovative methodology enabling countries to measure their current biodiversity expenditures, assess their financial needs in the medi-

um term and identify the most suitable finance solutions to bridge their national biodiversity finance gaps.

"The success of this initiative is invaluable since it will have far reaching effects not just for the province of Occidental Mindoro but to the whole country as well," said Sato.

A former governor of Occidental Mindoro, Sato has been supportive of various initiatives that seek to promote the protection and conservation of the environment and its rich biodiversity such as the New Conservation Areas in the Philippines (NewCAPP) Project, which started when she was the Governor of Occidental Mindoro.

"We are fortunate that Mt. Iglit-Baco was one of the areas chosen by the NewCAPP Project," she said.

Sato said UNDP's sustained effort towards biodiversity, inclusive growth and development is worthy

of government all-out support, as she vowed to help push the policy agenda to raise investments for biodiversity.

"Occidental Mindoro is a microcosm of the Philippines that is continuously challenged with the twin problems of poverty and environmental degradation. Add to the pressure is to become adaptive to climate change while striking balance between biodiversity conservation, social justice, self-reliant and sustainable domestic economy," she said.

Sato, along with Senator Loren Legarda is backing moves to fast-track measures that will expand the coverage of the National Integrated Protected Areas System (NIPAS) Act.

She recently filed House Bill (HB) 177 or the Expanded NIPAS to enhance the protection of 100 protected areas, which still do not have legislative backing or support.

Remate

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PINANGUNAHAN ng Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) katuwang ang Climate Change Commission (CCC) at Office of Senator Loren B. Legarda ang isang araw na National Symposium and Exhibit on Bamboo and Climate Change nitong November 21, 2016 sa Hotel Sofitel sa Pasay City.

Sa temang "Bamboo for Resilience" binigyang-diin sa buong araw na pagtitipon ang kahalagahan ng mga kawayan bilang strategic tool to mitigate the effects of climate change at bilang isang sustainable economic development.

Kabilang sa mga dumalo sina DENR Secretary Regina Paz Lopez, Senator Legarda, CCC Secretary/Vice Chairman Emmanuel De Guzman, Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) Secretary Ramon Lopez, Ilocos Sur representative Victorino Savellano at 200 experts at stakeholders.

Binigyang-diin ni Secretary Lopez ang plano ng ahen-

siya sa pagtataguyod ng isang milyong hektaryang bamboo plantation sa mga critical watershed area at sa ilang lugar kung saan ipinatutupad ang Enhanced National Greening Program (ENGP) sa ilalim ng administrasyon ni Pangulong Rodrigo R. Duterte.

Kabilang sa mga pinag-usapan ang bamboo biology, utilization, enterprise, post harvest technologies at mga policy / advocacy support for bamboo.

Nagkaroon ng oportunidad ang mga dumalo upang masaksihan ang iba't ibang gamit ng mga kawayan at napag-alaman ang kagandahan ng pagtataguyod ng isang community-based enterprises sa mga rural area.

Ang mga kawayan ay isa lamang sa mga fastest-growing plant kabilang sa Poaceae (Gramineae) family na lumalaki ng one meter kada araw. Kinikilala ito bilang mabisang panlaban sa climate change at sa biomass production at renewability nito.

Base sa mga pag-aaral, kayang humawak ng hanggang 400% carbon per unit area ang isang kawayan at nakakapaglabas ito ng 35% oxygen kumpara sa ibang puno.

Pero namamatay ito kapag hindi naalagaan sa loob ng sampung taon. Sa

ANG INYONG LINGKOD

DR. HILDA C. ONG

'BAMBOO SYMPOSIUM' ISINAGAWA NG DENR

tamang pamamaraan ng pagkuha ng mga bahagi nito, ang root system nito ay nabubuhay at patuloy na sumisipit ng carbon.

Alam n'yo ba na sa mahigit isang libong uri ng kawayan sa buong mundo, 49 sa mga ito ay tumutubo sa Pilipinas. Magandang oportunidad ito para sa bansa upang maging second largest bamboo producer in the world kasunod ng China na mayroong 50% market share.

Nitong 2009, nasa ikaanim na puwesto ang bansa bilang biggest exporter ng mga bamboo product na nagkakahalaga ng US\$30 million. Ang international market value of commercial bamboo ay umabot sa US\$20 billion nitong 2015 dahil sa tumataas na demand para sa mga eco-friendly alternative to wood.

Ang kawayan ay naging ganap na matured sa loob lamang ng limang taon

at puwedeng makapag-harvest isang beses kada dalawang taon sa loob ng 100 hanggang 120 years. Hindi lugl kapag nag-invest sa mga kawayan.

Isa ang paglalagay ng bamboo plantation sa mga balakin ng binuwag na Anti-Illegal Logging Task Force (AILTF) na pinamumunuan dati ni Gen. Renato Miranda.

Noon pa man ay nakita na niya ang potensiyal pang-ekonomiko at magandang epekto nito sa kalikasan.

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

Should jeepneys undergo a 'phaseout' or a face-lift?



Michael Makabenta Alunan

ON THE CONTRARY

JEEPNEYS may be considered by many as a pesky lot, being old, dilapidated and terrible smoke-belchers that deserve to be phased out under the Department of Transportation's (DOTr) transport modernization program.

While a phaseout looks good, having been crafted by scented and well-heeled policy-makers of the Aquino administration, many of whom favor more big businesses, on the contrary, there are also equally convincing technical arguments proposing a face-lift for jeepneys instead of a phaseout.

Modernization is for big boys? Transport modernization, unwittingly, favors big businesses because it calls for a vehicle or engine replacement, which can mean a P150-billion replacement market for vehicle manufacturers, dealers and the banks doing all the financing.

While it is good for them, it will mean an added burden to the drivers, who will pay the amortizations.

It also calls for some centralization or clustering to be managed by professional "fleet managers" along the traditional, more efficient big business corporate models.

While market-oriented big business models are efficient in terms of economies of scale, they reverse government's thrust toward more inclusivity. If efficiency is a problem, there are multiple ways to achieve this, and still retain the current ownership structures and business models.

Jeepneys are microbusiness-

Most jeepneys, including

are owned by ordinary people is the fact some of their bumper tail flaps carry messages, like "katas ng Saudi" (juice of Saudi).

Jeepneys provide so much employment and livelihood. Apart from the operator, who earns the daily "boundary income", jeepneys provide employment to two drivers per unit.

Thus, many jeepney groups oppose transport modernization, if it translates to a phase out. Unfortunately, most oppose without taking steps themselves to comply with the program's goals.

New jeepney group rises to the need. A new group, the National Jeepney Federation for Environmental Sustainable Transport (NJFEST), headed by Ronald Baroidan, has responded seriously to the clarion call, even adopting DOTr's Environmental Sustainable Transport (EST) strategy to its name, but still opposing a phase out on the argument there is no guarantee a brand-new vehicle will not be a smoke-belcher after purchase. Experience shows this is a "nonsequitur" as it does not necessarily follow.

For Baroidan, jeepney drivers are the usual whipping boy of "legal" bul-
lies from traffic enforcers, to erring

tions, so they go out again only to get caught and penalized anew. So they are forced to bribe their way to continue driving. But no amount of penalties or frequency of arrests will reduce emissions, nor will a vehicle or engine replacement really reduce emissions. Section 46 of the Clean Air Act requires that apart from penalties, violators must undergo a seminar on emission reduction.

Section 11 mandates that government must make available all the information on best practices, techniques and technological options on pollution control, thereby empowering motorists on making more intelligent choices. But this can't be done fully as Section 15 on Air Pollution Research remains unfunded and unimplemented.

It is ironic that Researchers for Clean Air (ResCueAir), a group of scientists and researchers from academe led by Prof. Edgar Vallar, PhD, from De La Salle and Mylene Cayetano, PhD, from UP Diliman, even spent their own personal money to bring in German experts and equipment to study black carbon in our ambient air, in the absence of support from the government. And yet, there are hundreds of millions of pesos with Depart-

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Should jeepney
undergo a phaseout or a
face-lift?

Most jeepneys, including the ubiquitous tricycles nationwide, are micro home-based businesses. Most operators own one or just a few units. Only a few operators own more than 10 units, which are distributed to their children. Jeepneys provide so much employment and livelihood. Apart from the operator, who earns the daily "boundary income", jeepneys provide employment to two drivers per unit.

JEEEP on the go, but blocked?

Against threats of a phase out, NJFEST sought Environmental Management Bureau-National Capital Region (EMB-NCR) Director Minda Osorio's help to jointly launch the Jeepney for the Environment and Energy-Efficient Program (JEEEP), which attempts to develop a seminar template implementing both Section 11 and Section 46, even in the absence of funds.

Engr. Dave Garcia, NJFEST's consultant, said the JEEEP lecture-seminar is good as starters, but there is no substitute to hands-on practical learning, and making trial tests on all the techniques, best practices and technological options available.

After all, there is no substitute to experiential learning. Similarly, one can never learn how to drive or swim by reading guidebooks, without actual physical driving or swimming. NJFEST requests if the EMB-NCR can fund their research by buying for them the numerous little items, such as lubricants, filters, gadgets and additives, etc. which form part

producing official receipts from a caterer and bloat the number of participants along with pictures as proof. As the caterer needs to get a cut for this, this reduces the net amount, and triggers unnecessary suspicions of shady deals.

What's dirty with our air. This is ironic as the DENR purchases hundreds of millions of pesos worth of ambient air monitoring stations every year from the same supplier, almost on a negotiated basis. Worst, most are not functioning, and if they do, most can't read real time. And for the few upgraded with real-time loggers with the EMB-NCR, that can now read real time, they are still inaccurate as the base equipment are considered obsolete, and have a high 25-percent deviation in accuracy, far from the world standard of 2.5 percent.

The government must invest on solutions to emissions at source, and not on yearly purchases of these monitoring stations that only reads how polluted the air is. Unless monitoring can do real-time measurement for more accurate averaging, readings will be erratic as air turbulence from sea breeze, for example, can alter actual results.

If we are truly serious to clean the air and mitigate climate change, let's change the climate of governance, starting with the overhaul of ridiculous bureaucratic practices.

Few will know, fuel is "it". As we keep on blaming the driver and the government for many of the problems, including air pollution, few will know that the main culprit is the presence of polyaromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), the compounds present in Light Cycle Oil, which is a waste product of refineries that are blended by as much as 11 percent of diesel. It is the PAHs that are producing the black carbon.

For so long, few will know this matter present in fuel. But with the information explosion and the pol-

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Water interconnectedness and a fragmented response

COMMENTARY

ERNESTO M. ORDÓÑEZ

Water interconnects many of our basic needs.

It is therefore a wonder—and somewhat of a tragedy—that there is a fragmented response to the emerging global water crisis.

We still do not have a comprehensive water roadmap for our country. Nor do we have a unified body that will implement such a roadmap.

In 1999, the National Water Resources Board (NWRB) came up with a national water plan. It failed because it had inadequate government support.

In 2010, the National Economic Development Authority (Neda) formulated a water document.

Unfortunately, it focused mainly on a network to supply water to different sectors.

Last Sept. 14, NWRB Executive Director Sevillo David Jr. called for a water roadmap meeting.

However, there was only low level representation from too few government agencies and the private sector.

Recent events

During the Climate Change Week that ended last Nov. 26, I participated in two events. One was the Bamboo Conference. DENR Secretary Gina Lopez explained how DENR's plan to plant bamboo in 1 million hectares would significantly

address our current watershed problem of 5.7 million denuded hectares.

Today, only 20,000 hectares are planted to bamboo, which can survive even with little maintenance.

This is a departure from the many failed reforestation programs, wherein the planted trees did not survive because of lack of maintenance.

A second event was the Climate Change Commission awarding of the top 10 LGU climate change programs by Secretary Manuel de Guzman. Sen. Loren Legarda explained how the awarded LGUs should be made models for water conservation and solid waste management, which greatly impacts water safety.

These two events are closely interconnected by water. But so are many other players in our country.

DENR is planting bamboo in 1 million hectares and restoring the 300,000 has. of mangrove forests we have lost.

These mangroves help us keep water in the forests as well as protect our coastal areas from storm surges.

DA is helping farmers ad-

dress too little water during droughts, and too much water during floods. It does this with climate-resistant varieties.

It also promotes more efficient irrigation.

DepEd is educating our children on the importance and practice of using and preserving water.

Their new vegetable gardening program in the curriculum promotes eating vegetables and children are taught that vegetable production requires less water than meat production.

For the private sector, architects and engineers are now including water encatchment and disposal systems in the buildings, houses and infrastructure they design.

Industries have factories which use recycled water and water effluents adopting the newest technologies and practices that preserve and decontaminate water.

Action needed

However, given the impending water crisis, are there enough of these activities going on in each sector?

Even if there are enough programs, are the technologies and practices used the best available in the market?

And is the potential synergy from these interconnected sectors being harnessed?

These important and urgent questions must be addressed by a comprehensive roadmap.

In so doing, each sector should review and analyze the magnitude and effectiveness of its programs.

These sectors can then unite to take advantage of possible synergies.

But this will not happen automatically.

The government, with Senator Loren Legarda, Secretary Gina Lopez, and the Climate Change Commission, should lead in the roadmap formulation.

But no less than President Rodrigo Duterte should unite the approximately 30 water-related government agencies to help implement this roadmap.

There should likewise be a public-private sector body chaired by the President which will deliver a united response to the interconnected water challenge we face today.

INQ



The author is Agriwatch Chair, former Secretary of Presidential Programs and Projects, and former Undersecretary of DA and DTI. Contact is agriwatch_phil@yahoo.com

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DoE asked to pursue \$500-m e-vehicles

By Alena Mae S. Flores

THE Electric Vehicle Association of the Philippines on Tuesday urged the Energy Department to reconsider its cancellation of the Asian Development Bank loan for the rollout of 100,000 electric tricycles.

EVAP president Rommel Juan said in a statement the department should look at re-aligning the loan to other electric vehicles, which still needed government support.

"We, as an organization and as industry players, wish to give our suggestions to the DoE in the hope of making the program more successful. We believe that the \$500-million fund by the ADB may still be used in other EV-related projects not necessarily requiring a formal bidding," Juan said.

Energy Secretary Alfonso Cusi earlier said the department cancelled the government's \$300-million loan from the ADB and another \$100 million from the Clean Technology Fund for the rollout of 100,000 e-trikes.

The loans were supposed to finance the \$500-million introduction of energy-efficient electric vehicles that aimed to replace 100,000 gasoline-fed tricycle units. The government was supposed to shoulder the remaining \$100 million under the project.

"We do not wish for this fund to be wasted and simply be returned to ADB. There are plenty of opportunities in the country for EVs, may it be three-wheeled e-trikes or even four-wheeled

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LLDA BUBUWAGIN 'PAG 'DI NAAPOS ANG FISHPEN

SA wakas, pinasisilip na rin ni Pang. Rodrigo Duterte, kasabay ng babala nito na kanya ring bubuwagin ang Laguna Lake Development Authority (LLDA) kapag hindi nito napalilit ang sakop ng mga fishpen sa buong Laguna de Bay.

Kapag hindi sinunod ni LLDA General Manager (GM) Neric Acosta at iba pang mga opisyal nito ang pinatrabaho sa kanila ni Digong ay uutusan na ng Pangulo ang mga sundalo para sirain ang mga fishpen na kung saan ay pinoprotekhan ng ilang tiwaling opisyal ng nasabing ahensiya.

Masyado na nga namang agrabyado ang maliliit na mangingisda natin sa Laguna de Bay at iba pa dahil sa sangkaterbang fishpen na nakatayo sa lawa.

Nagbubunga ito ng kawalan ng

maliliit na mangingisda ng pagkakataong mangisda sa lawa.

Sa totoo lang daw, ayon kay Pang. Duterte, dapat lang na bigyan ng mas malawak na lugar ang maliliit nating mangingisda para nga naman makapalaot sa buong nasasakupang karagatan ng bansa.

Hanggang sa ikalawang linggo ng Disyembre lamang ang tangingin Pang. Duterte kay Environment Sec. Gina Lopez para ayusin ang matagal nang problema ukol sa LLDA na kung saan ay isa ito sa mga tinik sa lalamunan at pinagmumulan ng gutom at kahirapan ng mga mangingisda.

Ang LLDA ang siyang nagregulate at nagmonitor sa mga nangyayari na may kinalaman sa mga ilegal na gawain sa buong La-



guna de Bay at saklaw nito 'yung sandamukal na fishpen sa Lawa ng Laguna.

Kaya ang anomang anomalya na pagaganap sa pagsulpot ng sangkaterbang fishpen sa Laguna de Bay ay awtomatikong may mga kinalalaman ang mga opisyal ng nasabing ahensiya.

Ano ang masasabi ninyo, GM Acosta?

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Atienza backs dismantling of fishpens in Laguna Bay

HOUSE Deputy Minority Leader and Buhay Hayaang Yumabong (Buhay) party-list Rep. Lito Atienza yesterday backed President Rodrigo "Rody" Duterte's directive to dismantle fishpens and illegal structures in Laguna de Bay.

Atienza lauded President Duterte for accepting the fact that these fishpens not only deprive the small fisherfolk of their livelihood, but cause massive flooding in Metro Manila and Southern Tagalog.

He said fishpens and the water lilies clog Laguna de Bay and prevent it from serving as a catch basin for the free flow of rain water.

"We fully support President Duterte's order for the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) to immediately dismantle the fishpens in Laguna de Bay. In fact, he gave a deadline for this that this should be done and the

lake cleared of fishpens by the second week of December. He is the first President to have responded correctly to this issue and confronted it.

"The Laguna Lake has steadily deteriorated because of the proliferation of fishpens owned by big businessmen and even foreigners. This problem -- which is made worse by the lack of determined effort on the part of lake authorities who should be protecting it -- has been left unattended, causing not only the degradation of Laguna de Bay, but affecting other lakes in the country as well. Most of the lakes are also illegally occupied by fishpens, leaving the waters badly degraded," said Atienza.

Atienza, as former Environment secretary, addressed the problem and started clearing not only Laguna de Bay, but also other water bodies such as Manila Bay.

But due to his limited

tenure, Atienza said he was not able to finish the job, adding this was one of his frustrations -- seeing the problem but not being able to solve it.

As congressman since 2013, Atienza continued to call attention to the problem but this only landed on the deaf ears of the previous administration.

"The country is blessed with more than 200 lakes spread all over the islands which are home to some of the rarest species of fish and some of which are endemic only to the Philippines. If properly managed, our water and aquatic resources could even feed the whole world with quality sealife, according to the United Nations' World Food Program (WFP) studies. It is ironic, therefore, that these natural gifts have not benefitted our people, even making the fisherfolk the poorest sector in society," Atienza said during his privilege speech.

Ryan Ponce Pacpaco

The Manila Times

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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

Atienza backs dismantling of Laguna Lake fishpens

BUHAY Partylist Representative and Senior Deputy Minority Leader Lito Atienza welcomed and expressed full support for President Duterte's directive to dismantle the fishpens and illegal structures in Laguna de Bay.

He said President Rodrigo Duterte must have fully accepted the fact that these fishpens not only deprive the small fisherfolk of their livelihood but cause massive flooding in Metro Manila and Southern Tagalog, preventing the bay from serving as a catch basin of rain water.

Atienza, as former Environment Secretary, has started clearing not only Laguna de Bay, but also other waterbodies such as Manila Bay. But

his limited tenure failed him to finish the job. As congressman since 2013, Atienza continued to call attention to the problem but apparently ignored by the previous administration.

"The country is blessed with more than 200 lakes spread all over the islands, which are home to some of the rarest species of fish and some of which are endemic only to the Philippines. If properly managed, our water and aquatic resources could even feed the whole world with quality sealife, according to the United Nations' World Food Program (WFP) studies. It is ironic, therefore, that these natural gifts have not benefited our people even making the

fisherfolk the poorest sector in society," Atienza said during his privilege speech.

Atienza also pointed out that the Department of Environment and Natural Resources and the Laguna Lake Development Authority are not giving an accurate picture of the problem. According to their records, only 12,000 hectares of Laguna de Bay are occupied by fishpens - which is about 12 percent of the Lake's total area of 99,000 hectares.

"The truth is, one quick pass over the Lake will give a clear picture - over 60 percent is occupied by fishpens, leaving only a fraction of open water for thousands of fisherfolk," Atienza added.