

28 April 2023 Friday



**DENR**

# **NEWS ALERTS**

# **NEWS CLIPPINGS**

**STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE**





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# Mindoro oil spill: Damage to environment hits P7 B

By **BELLA CARIASO**

**Damage to the environment due to the oil spill from the sunken motor tanker *Princess Empress* has been estimated to reach around P7 billion.**

In an interview with ANC yesterday, Environment Secretary Maria Antonio Yulo-Loyzaga said the amount of damage was based on coral reefs, seagrasses, mangroves and fisheries exposed to the oil slick.

"What we have to do now is verify on the ground how much of these risks have actually been touched by oil, how many of the mangroves have been actually

destroyed and how much of these seagrasses have actually been affected," Loyzaga said.

She said the livelihood of 26,000 fisherfolk was also affected by the oil spill.

Citing an update from the University of the Philippines-Marine Science Institute, Loyzaga said the oil spill has reached Verde Island Passage.

"Not all the leaks have been

plugged. However, these have been significantly plugged. What we see by way of satellite is just a small amount of oil that continuously leaks and I understand there are two left of these leaks generating oil," she said.

Meanwhile, the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) reported that damage to fisheries, including income loss, has reached P3.8 billion.

The NDRRMC said most of the affected areas are in Occidental Mindoro, Oriental Mind-

oro, Marinduque, Romblon and Palawan.

Up to 40,897 families or 193,436 people have been affected by the oil spill.

As this developed, the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) confirmed that *Princess Empress* was "refurbished" at a shipyard in Navotas in 2020.

Caretaker Jerwin Crisostomo of Majestic Shipyard told NBI probers that the tanker was a "small vessel" when it was brought for remodeling. — **With Michael Punongbayan, Mark Ernest Villeza**





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## DENR: Oil spill damage hits P7 billion

EARLY estimates put the environmental damage from the Oriental Mindoro oil spill at P7 billion, Environment Secretary Antonia Yulo Loyzaga said on Wednesday.

In a TV interview, Loyzaga said the amount was based on the initial calculation by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) of "what could be exposed by way of coral reefs, seagrasses, mangroves and fisheries."

"The possible exposure area for us is P7 billion," Loyzaga said, referring to the initial estimated cost of the environmental damage caused by the oil spill from MT Princess Empress, which sank off the waters of Oriental Mindoro two months ago.

She said the DENR would need to "actually go underneath and verify" the data once it is safe to dive in waters affected by the oil spill.

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### DENR:...

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"We're not allowed to fish in the area. We're also not allowed to dive yet, but we want to do that immediately because we want to observe what the physical impacts are," Loyzaga said.

"What we have to do now is verify on the ground how much of these reefs have actually been touched, how many of the mangroves have actually been destroyed, and how many of the seagrasses have actually been affected," she added.

The National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) on Thursday offered a lower figure, saying the oil spill did P3.88 billion worth of damage and affected 40,000 families.

The estimated cost of damage included production losses among some 24,000 fishermen and farmers, the NDRRMC said in a report.

Fishermen have been ordered to stay ashore in several areas while the oil spill cleanup is ongoing.

Mimaropa accounted for the bulk of the cost of damage at around P3.75 billion, while the rest was recorded in Calabarzon and Western Visayas, the disaster agency said.

The Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) earlier said the fisheries

sector loses around P19 million daily as the oil spill damage drags on.

The NDRRMC report also said 40,897 families or 193,436 individuals were affected by the oil spill caused by a tanker that went down in rough seas on Feb. 28.

The government, local authorities and non-government organizations have provided P140 million worth of assistance to affected residents, the social welfare department said in a separate statement.

The Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) earlier said that the oil leak from MT Princess Empress was "significantly controlled" with cleanup efforts 74 percent to 80 percent complete.

PCG said in a Facebook post that its incident management team has completed 74.82 percent of its cleanup efforts in Naujan town, while the cleanup at Pola town was 80.71 percent complete.

"The oil spill response team said they cleaned 28 out of 34 kilometers of affected shoreline in Pola and five out of seven kilometers in Naujan," the PCG said.

Three barangays in Pola town were also declared 100 percent clean: Tiguihan, Zone 1, and Zone 2.

Despite this, the PCG noted that some seven kilometers of shoreline in Pola and two kilometers in Naujan were still contaminated with oil. **Charles Dantes and Rio Araja**





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## DENR PUTS INITIAL OIL SPILL DAMAGE TO ENVT AT P7B

By JONATHAN L. MAYUGA  
@jonlmayuga

**T**HE Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) has placed environmental damage caused by the Oriental Mindoro oil spill at P7 billion.

This was revealed by DENR Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga during an interview in ANC's Headstart.

Environmentalists have expressed dismay over what they describe as the inadequate response

of the government and the DENR, the agency mandated to manage the country's natural wealth.

In particular, they want the DENR to come up with a damage assessment of the disaster, dismayed that the agency was slow even to come up with public pronouncements and update of its ongoing coastal cleanup and damage assessment activities.

The MT Princess Empress sank off the waters of Naujan on February 28, 2023.

SEE "DENR," A2

## DENR...

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It was carrying 900,000 liters of industrial oil that continue to spread in various coastal towns in the Mimaropa, particularly Oriental Mindoro, and the Western Visayas Region.

The estimate was based on "what could be exposed by way of coral reefs, seagrasses, mangroves and fisheries," the DENR chief was quoted in a statement.

"The possible exposure area for us is P7 billion," Loyzaga said, referring to the initial estimated cost of the environmental damage caused by the oil spill.

However, she said the DENR would need to "actually go underneath and verify" once it is safe to dive in waters severely affected by the oil spill.

"We're not allowed to fish in the area. We're also not allowed to dive yet, but we want to do that immediately because we want to observe what the physical impacts are," Loyzaga pointed out.

"What we have to do now is verify on the ground how much of these reefs have actually been touched, how many of the mangroves have actually been destroyed, and how many of the seagrasses have actually been affected," she added.

During the interview, the apparently defensive Loyzaga explained the role of the DENR in the "whole-of-government" response to the oil spill disaster.

"The DENR is responsible for offshore and nearshore contamination and impacts," Loyzaga explained.

"The general operation is legally under the

direction of the Philippine Coast Guard [PCG]. So they are onsite right where the source is happening. We are left to actually work on the forensics, what is happening, where the hazards going, what will be affected, and our area is nearshore and offshore."

Loyzaga said the DENR was first on the scene as soon as the news about the oil spill broke out. The DENR chief said that on Day One, she was already meeting with Oriental Mindoro Governor Bonz Dolor and had a technical meeting with PCG and other agencies involved in the oil spill response.

On Day Two, Loyzaga said the DENR teams were already on the ground testing the water and air in oil spill-hit areas.

"Day Three, we deployed the mapping ship of NAMRIA. Why? Nobody could say where the ship had sunk and we didn't have a remotely operated vessel, so we sent the mapping ship we used to map the Philippine Rise to actually identify where the ship was underneath the water," she narrated.

She said that from the third to fifth day, the DENR was already coordinating with the University of the Philippines-Marine Science Institute, the Department of Social Welfare and Development, the Department of Labor and Employment, the Department of Tourism, and the private sector.

"Every step of the way, we actually reported to the President," Loyzaga added.





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## Mindoro oil spill: Still a murky affair

CITY OF CALAPAN, ORIENTAL MINDORO—Ronald Prado, 48, is still trying to accept the fact that his morning routine of waking up early to fish in the waters of Oriental Mindoro's Pola town has stopped for the past two months. Life in most fishing villages in the province has come to a virtual standstill after a tanker spilled much of its fuel oil cargo on Feb. 28, contaminating large coastal areas. —STORY BY

MADONNA T. VIOLA AND JANE BAUTISTA

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By **Madonna T. Viola**  
and **Jane Bautista**  
@Team\_Inquirer

CITY OF CALAPAN, ORIENTAL MINDORO—Ronald Prado, 48, is still trying to accept the fact that his peaceful morning routine of waking up early to fish in the abundant waters of Oriental Mindoro's Pola town has stopped for the past two months.

The authorities banned fishing and swimming in the waters of Pola and other coastal towns after the tanker MT Princess Empress spilled much of its cargo of 800,000 liters of industrial fuel oil when it sank off Prado's quiet and remote village of Misong on Feb. 28.

Within a few days, Pola and eight other Oriental Mindoro towns each declared a state of calamity as the thick oil slick from the sunken tanker reached their shores, and life in the province's fishing villages and beach resorts came to a virtual standstill.

"We are used to seeing vessels sail across [the sea], but we were never prepared for a disaster like this," Prado's wife, Edna, Misong's village chief, said in a phone interview.

She said her village is receiving relief supplies and assistance such as cash-for-work and outright financial aid.

Some villagers earn P500 weekly for cleaning up the oil sludge on the shores for five hours daily, Edna said.

In the other worst-hit village of Calima, also in Pola, village officials said the cash-for-work program was difficult for the fishers who had to put up with the foul smell of oil and wear personal protective equipment. Some complained of headaches.

The irony of the disaster was not lost on Calima village chief Leodegario Fetizanan.

"We are victims of the oil spill, and yet we have to work for the money that we need because we lost our livelihood," he told the Inquirer.

Assistance has been "elusive" to people affected by the oil spill far from "ground zero," according to Nerie Macalalad, a fishing community organizer in Barangay San Antonio in Naujan, a town adjacent to Pola.

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# Mindoro oil spill: Still a murky affair 2 months later

**FROM AG**

"Is there hope that we can ask for help even just to buy eggs and sardines?" she said, adding that only 76 people were selected for the cash-for-work program. "Many others need assistance. We are also affected by the fishing ban."

Aside from headaches experienced by people on shore cleanup tasks, Edna said several people, including members of her family, complained of respiratory problems and were coughing a lot, possibly due to the oil's spill impact on air quality.

She said that the foul smell of the oil had reached a hilltop school.

To cope, people just drink water and take cough and other kinds of medicines provided by the Department of Health.

## Keen on suing

Nerissa Magbanua, a resident of Barangay Navotas in Calapan, the provincial capital, believes the oil spill is worse than the pandemic.

"We hope that the fishing ban will only be enforced in some areas," she says.

Other fishers interviewed by the Inquirer said they were confused by pronouncements of contamination because their boats do not show oil stains and the fish look fresh.

"Are experts to be believed more than our many years of experience? Fishers' families are still eating fish, and there has been no harmful effect so far," said Francisco Fortu, the

chair of Barangay Silonay.

Some people, like 72-year-old Feliciano Alban, are not taking any chances and stopped buying fish.

With hardly any fish sold, the fishing ban has silenced the wet markets as there are no more casual and cheery banter between fish vendors and buyers.

Women like Nedy Fortu, 60, of Barangay Maidlang, have been dependent on fish sales for 35 years. Fortu said her earnings had dipped to just enough to buy rice for the family.

Children of fishermen like Grade 11 student Mark Gil Marasigan, 19, laments their losses, saying his family can only pray for miracles.

Pola Mayor Jennifer Cruz, in earlier media interviews, was firmly decided on filing cases against those responsible for the oil spill. She has sought help from the Department of Justice (DOJ) and the National Bureau of Investigation.

Edna said she and other villagers have yet to file damage claims for fear that they would just be abandoned after they do.

"We do not know until when our case will be [heard], but what if the owner of the vessel would just abandon us upon release of our claims?" she said.

## Agri losses at P3B

The Office of Civil Defense (OCD) reported that nearly 200,000 people, mostly in Oriental Mindoro, and other parts of Region 4, including Batangas, Marinduque, Romblon and Palawan, and as far as Western Visayas, had been affected by the oil spill.

**Environmental and other civil society groups have been criticizing the government for its supposed 'slow' response and 'lack of sense of urgency' in the incident, particularly in holding accountable the owners of the sunken tanker**

It estimated that losses to agriculture and fisheries amounted to P3 billion as of Wednesday this week.

The Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) is recommending keeping the fishing ban in the municipalities hit by the oil spill in Oriental Mindoro while food safety has yet to be fully established.

About 300,000 liters of fuel oil remain in the sunken vessel and pose a "clear and present danger," according to Justice Undersecretary Raul Vasquez.

During an interagency meeting for the oil spill response led by the DOJ early this week, the vessel's insurer, Protection and Indemnity, was given 10 days to report on its plan to siphon off the remaining fuel and the possible retrieval of the sunken tanker.

A siphoning operation usually takes about two months—seven to 10 days for evaluation, seven days to ship the equipment and 21 days for the actual opera-

tion—according to the OCD.

Vasquez said that the NBI had "more or less completed the fact-finding data" in filing either a criminal or administrative case against the vessel owner, RDC Reield Marine Services Inc., and other government agencies and private individuals.

## Settlement offer

He also said that the country could claim as much as \$284 million (P15.8 billion) from the International Oil Pollution Compensation (IOPC) Funds.

The BFAR estimated the fisherfolk's claims could total P500 million while damage to the environment could reach at least P1 billion.

IOPC Funds director Gaute Sivertsen said his delegation just concluded a fact-finding mission.

"Right now, we are collecting claims forms from the victims, to be assessed by the experts, to concentrate on fish-

erfolk and those who are most in need and then we will offer settlements as soon as possible," Sivertsen said on Tuesday.

The UK-based IOPC is an intergovernmental organization with more than 120 member states, including the Philippines, that provides compensation for oil pollution damage.

The oil spill has also threatened the Verde Island Passage (VIP), the marine corridor where the South China Sea and Pacific Ocean waters converge.

The VIP is one of the most important marine ecosystems in the world and is said to host about 60 percent of the world's known shorefish species. The passage provides livelihood and food resources to over 2 million people and serves as a shipping route to international ports in Batangas, Manila and Subic Bay.

## Underwater damage

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) estimated that a total of P7 billion worth of marine resources might potentially be exposed to the massive oil spill.

Three major ecosystems—mangrove forests, seagrass beds and coral reefs—are in the way of the oil spill trajectories across the provinces of Oriental Mindoro, Palawan and Antique, according to the DENR's Biodiversity Management Bureau.

Environmental and other civil society groups have been criticizing the government for its supposed "slow" response and "lack of sense of urgency" in the incident, particularly in holding accountable the owners of the sunken tanker.

"The DENR's claim of close-

ly working with concerned government agencies to resolve the oil spill issue falls short when we consider the glaring question: How long will it take for them to truly hold the owners of MT Princess accountable?" Philippine Movement for Climate Justice said.

Environment Secretary Ma. Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga said that the DENR's task is to focus on the "forensics" of what happened and the hazards and threats from the oil spill, with the DOJ in charge of filing cases.

Liza Osorio, legal and policy director of Oceana Philippines, in a webinar on Wednesday pointed out that based on Republic Act No. 9483, the liability of oil spill pollution from ships could be measured through the cleanup operations expenses at sea or on shore.

The damages also include preventive measures expenses, consequential loss or loss of earning suffered as a direct result of an incident, and the pure economic loss or loss of earnings sustained by the fisherfolk and tourism sector.

Jordan Fronda, research advocacy campaigner of the Center for Environmental Concerns, earlier said that in Pola, Oriental Mindoro, each family reported an average loss of P7,500 income per month.

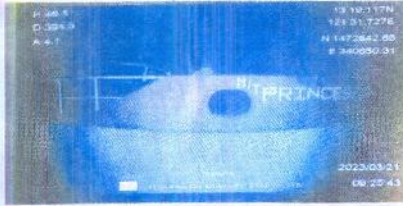
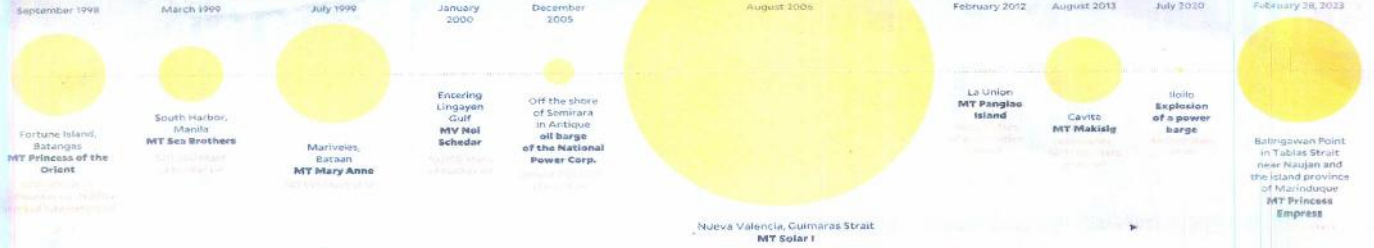
According to Fronda, 86.5 percent of the respondents from Pola stated that their earnings were not enough, with 38.5 percent saying they had zero income since the oil spill prompted a fishing ban in their areas. —WITH REPORTS FROM JACOB LAZARO AND FRANCES MANGOSING

INQ





OIL SPILLS IN THE PHILIPPINES



Sunken MT Princess Empress located with the aid of a remotely operated vehicle

# MINDORO OIL SPILL: STILL A MURKY AFFAIR 2 MONTHS LATER

San Isidro Corona

PUERTO GALERA

MAGSAYSAY

MINDORO

SABLAYAN

CORON

Semirara Sibolo

Tinogboc



Possible oil seen from March 26 to April 2

BATANGAS CITY

ISLA VERDE

Baco Chico Island

Calapan

Naujan

Pola

Pinamatayan

Gloria

Bansud

Bongabong

Roxas

Mansalay

Bulacao

Magsaysay

- estimated 500 sqm mangrove affected
  - estimated 200 sqm mangrove affected
- Oil spill related incidents as of April 19
- Oil Spill within the shoreline
  - Oil Spill within the coastal water
  - 2 kilometers away from the shoreline
  - Oil with 7 inches thick to 1.5 meter thick spread
  - Oil slick seen at the rocky shoreline
  - Traces of oil were seen in the area

On March 5, oil slicks were reported to have reached Agutaya, the first area in Palawan to have reported traces from the oil spill. Days later on March 10, Coast Guard Patawan confirmed the presence of an oil slick in Casleran Island village of Taytay town north of the division. The barge is 100 nautical miles or 295 kilometers off the waters of Naujan, Orinduik of Mindoro.

AGUTAYA Concepcion Algeciras

Habitat area affected in Oriental Mindoro based on a rapid assessment by DENR from March 6 to 10 (hectares)



Affected fisherfolk 13,636

Affected population 178,306

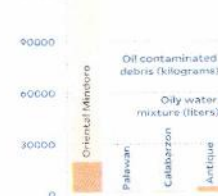
Western Visayas 4,080,500

Mimaropa

Calabarzon 2,644,798

Estimated value of damage to agriculture in pesos 3,708,328,564

Oil waste collected by regional disaster risk reduction and management council



\*Data as of April 19, 2023

SOURCES: ndrrmc.gov.ph, Philippine Space Agency and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration maps based on satellite images, Inquirer Archives, Philippine Coast Guard Twitter page, DENR

RESEARCH BY: Ana Roa, Marielle Medina, Angelika Ortega and Kiara Subingsubing

GRAPHICS BY: Maximilian Vill





## President inks EO to start water office

WITH the threat of a long dry season under an El Nino phenomenon coming, President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. on Thursday signed an executive order creating the Water Resources Management Office (WRMO) in the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR).

This developed as the Metro Manila Development Authority tackled a proposal to monitor and regulate businesses

using a lot of water, such as swimming pools and resorts, and car washes.

In a statement through the Presidential Communications Office, the WRMO is tasked to integrate and harmonize government efforts to ensure the availability and sustainable management of water resources in the country.

Under Executive Order No. 22, the

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### President...

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WRMO is mandated to "ensure the immediate implementation of the Integrated Water Resources Management in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and formulate a corresponding Water Resources Master Plan (IWMP)."

The EO was created to address the challenges that affect the management of water resources in the country, particularly with the increasing demand for water due to population and economic growth.

It also considers the impacts of climate change and the pandemic, and the lack of adequate infrastructure leading to uneven distribution of water resources, among others.

"To avert a water crisis, minimize and avoid conflicts, and consistent with the State's sole ownership and control over the country's water resources, it is imperative for the Government to integrate and harmonize the policies, programs, and projects of all relevant agencies in the water resource sector in the fulfillment of their complementary governmental mandates," the EO read.

The WRMO is tasked to "shepherd and champion, together with the Presidential Legislative Liaison Office, the passage of a law creating an apex body such as the proposed Department of Water and/or a regulatory commission on water."





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## MWSS: Regulate water use in carwash, pools, golf courses

A ranking official of the Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS) urged Metro Manila mayors to pass ordinances regulating the use of golf courses, car wash and swimming pools to address the dwindling water level in Angat Dam.

MWSS deputy administrator Jose Dorado Jr. said that at present, there are at least 10 golf courses operating in Metro Manila including four serviced by Maynilad Water Services Inc. The rest are served by Manila Water.

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### MWSS From Page 1

"These golf courses, which source their water from deep wells or from Angat Dam – consume at least 700 cubic meters to 1,400 cubic meters per month," Dorado said.

He said there are at least 1,000 car washes operating in the National Capital Region, which use 60 cubic meters to 100 cubic meters per month.

Dorado said a household consumes at least one cubic meter per day of water or 30 cubic meters in one month.

He said that while Angat is still operating at normal level, necessary measures should be put in place to ensure the preparedness in case the reservoir reaches critical level.

According to Dorado, during the meeting of the technical working group on the Angat operations, the water level of the reservoir will reach 180.51 meters by the end of July 2023.

"We hope that we will not reach the crisis level but we should be preparing for it. Based on the forecast of PAGASA, we have a simulation of 180.51 meters for Angat by the end of July. Once the operational level reaches 180 meters, the use will be limited for domestic water supply and Angat can no longer supply water to irrigation," Dorado said, referring to the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration.

Dorado said the water level in Angat Dam should not be allowed to drop to 150 meters.

As of 6 a.m. Thursday, the water level in Angat reached 196.01 meters, lower by .17 centimeters than its previous level of 196.18 meters.

Angat's water level is still 9.21 meters higher from its rule curve elevation of 186.80 meters, or the required elevation for the dam to be able to fulfill its functions.

### Additional 163 M liters per day

As this developed west zone concessionaire Maynilad Water Services Inc. is targeting to produce around 163 million liters per day (MLD) of additional water

supply from alternate sources as it accelerates its supply augmentation projects amid the threat of El Niño.

Maynilad said these supply augmentation projects – which are being done in preparation for El Niño – include the reactivation of 45 deep wells across the west zone.

It also covers the commissioning of two modular treatment plants in Cavite, tapping of additional cross-border points with Manila Water, construction of an auxiliary filtration system at the Putatan Water Treatment Plant, and production of an initial 50 MLD from its new water treatment plant in Poblacion, Muntinlupa.

The company said the additional supply to be generated from these projects would help improve supply reliability for some 700,000 Maynilad customers in parts of Manila, Muntinlupa, Las Piñas, Parañaque and Pasay as well as in Cavite.

"As these supply augmentation projects gradually come on stream over the course of the year, we should be able to generate more water supply for distribution to customers. This will cushion the impact of any supply constraints that may arise once the effects of El Niño are felt by the latter part of this year," Maynilad president and chief executive officer Ramoncito Fernandez said in a statement.

Apart from these projects, Maynilad said it also expects to recover more water for distribution through its non-revenue management program that covers active leakage control, selective pipe replacements and closure of illegal connections.

East zone concessionaire Manila Water assured its customers that it would continue providing uninterrupted water services by implementing sustainable solutions, innovative facilities and augmentation plans.

"All these form part of our initiatives toward water security. From day one, it has become our mission to ensure that our customers continue to receive 24/7 water services, especially during the summer season where demand normally spikes by 15 percent due to higher temperatures," Manila Water president and chief executive officer Jocot de Dios said.

– Bella Cariaso, Danessa Rivera, Cecille Suerte Felipe





# Mayors to firm up water conservation plan

**M**ETRO Manila Council chairman and San Juan City Mayor Francisco Javier "Francis" Zamora vowed to discuss the possibility of regulating the water use of certain establishments to help ease the water crisis in the National Capital Region.

Zamora's assurance stemmed from the appeal of the Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS) to local government units to draw up plans for water conservation.

"We can regulate the use. Regulate means we will give guidelines or rules on what can be done," Zamora said in a radio interview Thursday.

Among the proposals are to temporarily close down car washes, swimming pools and golf courses, establishments that usually consume huge amounts of water.

Zamora, however, ruled out the immedi-

ate closure of such establishments, saying the livelihood of their workers will be affected. He said the establishments that are big water users should be identified first.

"Are those necessary or should they be reduced? These are the ones that should be focused on and the mayors will talk about it in a meeting to discuss," he said.

Zamora also said he supports the call of water concessionaires and the national government to involve Metro Manila mayors in resolving the water crisis.

The MWSS earlier assured the water supply in the capital region is enough despite

rising demand and the dropping water level at dams in the wake of the dry season.

The agency said it had requested a bigger water allocation from the National Water Resources Board since the level at the La Mesa Dam continues to go down.

On Thursday, the water concessionaires in Metro Manila announced the continuing service interruptions in their areas of responsibility.

Maynilad said that several villages in the cities of Las Piñas, Muntinlupa, Parañaque, Pasay, and Cavite City, Noveleta and Rosario towns in Cavite will have service interruptions from April 25 until May 16.

"We encourage our affected customers to store enough water when supply is available. Upon resumption of water service, please let the water flow out briefly until it clears," it said.

Homeowners and businesses have been complaining about the water interruptions.

Maynilad attributed the interruptions

to low water production due to the highly turbid water in Laguna Lake which damaged the ultrafiltration backwash valve at the Putatan Water Treatment Plant 2.

"Maynilad already ordered the fittings needed to repair the leaking valve. Once the materials arrive, we will schedule the facility repair and provide the necessary updates, including the schedule of Manila Water announced that maintenance activities from April 27 to May 2 will affect water service in several areas in the cities of Pasig, Makati, Taguig, Parañaque, San Juan, Quezon City, and Cainta, Antipolo City, Angono and Binangonan in Rizal.

Jeric Sevilla, Manila Water spokesman, said maintenance work will be done from 10 p.m. to 4 a.m. every day.

During those hours, there will be no water supply.

**CHRISTIAN CROW MAGHANOY  
AND FRANCIS EARL CUETO**





## MOA on Caliraya-Lumot watershed rehab signed

The National Power Corp. (Napocor) has signed a memorandum of agreement (MOA) with the Climate Change Commission (CCC) for the rehabilitation of 25 hectares of denuded upland forest within the Caliraya-Lumot watershed forest reserve in Laguna.

Napocor president and chief executive officer Fernando Martin Roxas said the partnership would not only establish new plantations but also nourish reforested areas for eight years.

"This partnership will help us hasten the rehabilitation of the Caliraya-Lumot watershed, a critical water resource for Caliraya and Kalayaan hydroelectric power plants. Restoring these open areas will also enhance water conservation, erosion control and biodiversity conservation in the area," Roxas said.

Napocor said the MOA would utilize a comprehensive and integrated approach in implementing reforestation activities, including site assessment and planning, reforestation and tree planting as well as capacity-building of people's organizations and raising awareness in the communities.

CCC vice chairperson and executive director Robert Borje expressed his gratitude to Napocor for allowing the commission to take part in the watershed rehabilitation.

He said these would help offset carbon footprint as well as change and transform the lives, livelihoods and future of the people who will be affected by the project.

The partnership is part of Napocor's energy sector carbon sequestration initiative, a program it launched with the Department of Energy in October 2021.





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# More trees: Antidote to our heat problem

**T**he heat nowadays is debilitating; the word that comes to mind is not just “init,” but “banas,” which, like the heat index, also factors in humidity.

For most, the heat is just an inconvenience—one that causes sweat and discomfort; one that drives people to escape to the refuge of air-conditioned malls. But for some, it can be a health threat; in one city alone—Cabuyao, Laguna—83 students were supposed to have been hospitalized last March 23 due to heat exhaustion during fire and earthquake drills.

Some may write off the heat as an inevitable part of the season, but there is nothing “natural” about the heat that we experience. In the first place, the world is warmer today than even just a decade ago; according to the 2022 Global Climate Report from the NOAA National Centers for Environmental Information, “The 10 warmest years in the 143-year record have all occurred since 2010, with the last nine years (2014–2022) ranking as the nine warmest years on record.” And there is overwhelming evidence that this is caused by human activity.

More than the climate crisis itself, however, the very fact that we’re exposed to so much heat is a result of living in environments where there are very few trees. Cities are particularly notorious for forming “heat islands,” in which roads, buildings, rooftops, and other artificial surfaces absorb and emit heat. Add to that the heat from vehicles, and walking by the road or riding a jeepney becomes even more unbearable.

“To avoid this, because this is preventable, we advise the public to avoid going out in the sun, especially when the sun is too hot and always wear sun protection,” Department of Health officer in charge Maria Rosario Vergeire was quoted as saying. The Department of Education, for its part, said that schools may suspend classes if they think it is



## SECOND OPINION

GIDEON LASCO

necessary—amid calls to revert to the old academic calendar that avoided what we refer to as our “summer.”

It is a pity that the sun itself will limit people’s outdoor exposure which is already limited to begin with—especially in the aftermath of a pandemic that has caused many to fear the outdoors. It’s also a pity that air conditioning—our default solution—is only readily accessible to those who can afford it; I have seen households in Valenzuela and Pasay when several electric fans are not enough to cool one’s living room.

Alas, in many parts of our country, the ability to control temperature is a direct function of one’s income.

If our treelessness is a big reason for the heat, however, then there is one obvious—and very sustainable—antidote to our heat problem: More trees.

The cooling effect of trees, as it turns out, operates at multiple levels. The most obvious is that they provide shade, which is why, when I’m in Diliman, walking around the Academic Oval, under the acacia, is quite tolerable any time of the day. More than just serving as big umbrellas, trees either absorb solar energy or reflect it back to the atmosphere.

But there’s also evapotranspiration, which, simply put, is the process of absorbing water (via roots) and releasing it (via leaves and other plant surfaces), dissipating some of the atmospheric heat in the process of facilitating evaporation, cooling the environment in the same way that sweating cools down the body.

Trees also reduce energy use, which further helps reduce the heat. Air conditioners and fans may cool us but they also release “waste heat”; if we rely on them less, we produce less of this heat. And of course the more energy we use, the more we hasten global warming.

Which brings me to the trees’ longer-term cooling effect: They sequester carbon dioxide and can help avert the climate crisis.

The cooling effect of trees leads to other environmental benefits other than reducing heat. Just to give one example, they enable walkability—which reduces the demand for cars, which also reduces the heat.

Alas, trees are often seen as roadblocks to progress and are cut to give way to what some people insist as “development.” Where have all the tree-lined highways gone; roads like Pili Drive in Los Baños? And where are the forested parks that, in cities around the world, serve as giant air conditioners?

Worse, many think of trees as replaceable; that it’s okay to cut them as long as we replace them with seedlings. The fact is that an ancient tree—with its majestic trunk and extensive root system—offers so much more cooling effect than young ones and it will take decades, if not centuries to replace.

Having more trees—i.e., preserving the ones that exist and nurturing new ones—will not completely eliminate the heat or solve our many environmental problems, but it will surely make our urban and rural spaces a bit more bearable.

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# Proposed Land Use law gets House committee's approval

By JOVEE MARIE N. DELA CRUZ  
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**T**HE House Special Committee on Land Use on Thursday approved the proposed National Land Use (NLU) Act of the Philippines.

Committee Chairman Rep. Francisco Jose "Bingo" F. Matugas II (Surigao del Norte, First District) said the substitute bill is the consolidated version of 19 house bills.

The unnumbered substitute bill was approved after the endorsement of a technical working group (TWG) headed by Nueva Ecija Rep. Rosanna "Ria" V. Vergara.

"This [bill] is the product of several TWG sessions and the consideration of the position papers and comments submitted to the TWG by some committee members and various government agencies and stakeholders," Vergara said.

"We all know that our country is blessed with abundant natural resources and diverse landscapes, but these resources are not always used in the best way. This important legislation is a critical step toward achieving sustainable development in our country," she added.

The proposed NLU Act is included in the priority bills of the Legislative-Executive Development Advisory Council (Ledac).

According to Vergara, the consolidated version adopted and harmonized the common provisions in the various House bills calling for the establishment of a NLU Council (NLU) and similar councils at the regional, provincial, and city or municipal level.

## Further amplify

VERGARA said that during the TWG sessions, the participants agreed to further amplify provisions by creating the NLU as a Commission under the Office of the President and creating the positions of NLU Commissioner with the rank of Cabinet Secretary who shall act as NLU chairman and two Deputy Commissioners with the rank of Undersecretary.

Also, Vergara said they recommended naming the director of the Environmental, Land Use and Urban Planning and Development Bureau of the Department of Human Settlements and Urban Development (DHSUD) as the Executive Director of the NLU Office (NLUO). The latter shall serve as the technical secretariat to the NLU, Vergara explained.

She added they also included in the bill the creation of Regional Land Use Offices, or "RLUOs."

"These were introduced to empower the NLU in light of the magnitude of the powers and functions granted to it under the pro-

posed legislation and enable it to properly coordinate with the lower-level land use councils," the lawmaker explained.

## Special Areas of Concern

VERGARA said the various House bills provide specific provisions dealing with the so-called "Special Areas of Concern" (SAC). The SAC were identified as: forestlands and watersheds; coastal zones; settlements development; National Integrated Protected Areas System sites; agricultural lands; energy resources; industrial development areas; tourism development areas; and, infrastructure development.

"These provisions were adopted in this consolidated bill with some revisions based on the inputs given by the different agencies with expertise on these fields or with mandates to protect the interest of the marginalized sectors including the indigenous peoples and cultural communities," Vergara said.

In addition to these areas, the lawmaker said the TWG added agro-industrial development as an area of special concern.

The lawmaker said this new area was added in line with government's goal of "food security."

"This provision calls for the consolidation of small-scale agricultural landholding through a program to be established by the Department of Agriculture (DA) so as to take advantage of economies of scale in agricultural production and promote value chain development," she said.

In line with our thrust to attain food security, Vergara said the consolidated bill protects from conversion the following: prime agricultural lands as defined in the bill; all irrigated and irrigable lands; all lands developed or suitable for high value crops; and, all agricultural lands that are ecologically fragile and whose conversion will lead to serious environmental problems.

## Informed decisions

VERGARA said "in order to promote productive use of our land resources," the consolidated bill also seeks to impose an idle land tax on any person or entity who shall cause any irrigated land within the protected areas for agricultural development to lie idle and unproductive for a pe-

riod exceeding one year unless due to force majeure.

She added that the consolidated bill likewise seeks to penalize a landowner and designated developer who, without justifiable cause, fails to commence or complete the development of agricultural lands with approved order of conversion. More importantly, the bill seeks to authorize DHSUD to penalize LGUs who fail to formulate and implement their Comprehensive Land Use Plans (Clups) pursuant to Republic Act 11201 (DHSUD Law).

"Such failure may even lead to conviction and imprisonment of the local chief executive and other local officials and employees responsible for the formulation and enforcement of the Clups in certain cases and subject to compliance with due process requirements," she said.

At its core, Vergara said the proposed NLU Act is about "empowering communities to make informed decisions about how their land is used."

"It provides a mechanism for local governments and stakeholders to work together in identifying and prioritizing land use policies and projects that align with their unique needs and aspirations. This bottom-up approach to land use planning is critical in a country as diverse as the Philippines, where the needs of each community can vary greatly," she said.

"The National Land Use Act is an important piece of legislation that has the potential of enabling our country to maximize the use of our natural resources in a sustainable and coherent manner," she added.

## No assurance

FOR her part, Assistant Minority Leader and Gabriela Women's Party Rep. Arlene D. Brosas said the TWG's version of the administration's NLU bill would not ensure food security and sufficient public housing for Filipinos.

Brosas explained that what the NLU bill merely does is to protect existing irrigated and irrigable lands from conversion instead of expanding lands for food production, particularly rice and other key agricultural commodities.

Citing data from the Philippine Statistics Authority, she said that as of 2020, only 1.97 million hectares remain as irrigated lands.





TITLE:

editorial

## Let's revitalize our dying salt industry

THE Philippines is an archipelago with thousands of kilometers of coastline, a geographic feature ideal for salt production. Ironically, the country imports more than 90 percent of its salt requirements. The Philippine Association of Salt Industry Networks (PhilAsin) said our annual salt production has gone down to 60,000 metric tons, not enough to meet the country's requirements of up to 683,000 metric tons annually.

Lawmakers want Congress to help President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. rejuvenate the moribund Philippine salt industry by creating an interagency Philippine Salt Industry Development Council. House Bill 7357, authored by Camarines Sur Representatives LRay Villafuerte, Miguel Luis Villafuerte and Tsuyoshi Anthony Horibata, and Bicol Saro Rep. Brian Yamsuan, said the proposed interagency PSIDC will be tasked to craft a masterplan to expand areas devoted to salt-making, boost domestic salt output, promote investments in this sector and market Philippine products made from this essential nutrient. (*Read, "4 solons push bid to revive moribund PHL salt industry," in the BUSINESSMIRROR, April 24, 2023*).

"HB 7357 seeks to address the revitalization of the local industry by providing the right government support services for its protection and direction, specifically those that involve production and development," said Rep. LRay Villafuerte.

The measure mandates the PSIDC to craft a Philippine Salt Industry Development Roadmap comprising of programs and projects for the development and management, processing, utilization, business development, and commercialization of Philippine salt.

The solons cited four factors that nearly killed our salt industry, including the Philippine ratification of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade in 1994, which allowed cheap salt imports, and the enactment of Republic Act 8172 or the Act for Salt Iodization Nationwide (ASIN) Law in 1995, which required the addition of iodine to salt to address the country's micronutrient malnutrition.

"The capital requirement for the machinery and technology for salt iodization was a heavy burden for local salt makers, leading many of them to drop one by one and shift to other livelihood sources," the bill authors said.

The solons also traced the salt industry's continuous decline to rapid urbanization, which led to the conversion of more and more salt-producing places into residential and industrial areas, and erratic weather patterns caused by climate change, which adversely affected salt producers dependent on weather conditions.

To fund the proposed law, an initial amount of P100 million will be sourced from the contingency fund of the Office of the President. Additionally, an amount of P100 million shall be sourced from Pagcor revenues for the law's first year of implementation. After that, "the amount necessary for the effective implementation of this Act shall be included in the annual General Appropriations Act".

The proposed law gives local government units an important role: To work with the DA, BFAR, DTI, DOST- Forest Products Research and Development Institute and the National Fisheries Research and Development Institute to identify appropriate areas for local salt production in their respective localities.

HB 7357 provides for the establishment of provincial, city and municipal Salt Industry Development Councils (SIDCs) that shall regularly conduct a survey of existing salt farms and salt enterprises in their respective areas of jurisdiction. The bill directs the BFAR to be the Secretariat of the PSIDC, and to organize the necessary technical working group for the Council.

The bill has drawn up the following incentives for investors involved in salt production and development: The Board of Investments (BOI) shall classify salt farms as preferred areas of investment under its Investment Priorities Plan (IPP) subject to pertinent rules and regulations; salt farm owners, processors and other related businesses shall be exempt from the payment of import duties for imported machines and equipment subject to pertinent rules and regulations; salt farm owners in public lands shall be exempt from the payment of forest charges that may be imposed by the national government, and other fees or taxes imposed by LGUs; salt farmers and processors shall be given priority in accessing credit assistance and guarantee schemes being granted by government financial institutions; and salt farm development and their equipment shall be covered by the Philippine Crop Insurance Corp.

There's an urgent need to revitalize the Philippine salt industry because salt is a food security issue. Our inability to produce local salt will adversely affect the country's competitiveness in the long run.

A roadmap for the development, modernization and protection of the salt industry will help attract investments. To make the business environment attractive to small and medium enterprises, it would do well for the government to help promote alternative methods and techniques of salt farming that allow year-round production, given the erratic weather caused by climate change.





AVOIDING SHORTAGES

# WATER FIRMS READY SUPPLY PROJECTS AHEAD OF EL NIÑO

**By Jordeene B. Lagare**  
@jordeenelagare

The two water concessionaires for Metro Manila and adjacent areas have lined up various undertakings to brace for the impact of the looming El Niño on water supply.

In a statement on Thursday, West Zone concessionaire Maynilad Water Services Inc. announced it would implement this year various supply projects expected to produce about 163 million liters per day (MLD)

of additional water.

These include reactivating 45 deep wells across the West Zone, commissioning of two modular treatment plants in Cavite, and tapping of additional cross-border points with East Zone concessionaire Manila Water Co. Inc.

Maynilad is planning to construct an auxiliary filtration system at Putatan Water Treatment Plant and produce an initial 50 MLD from its new water treatment plant in Poblacion, Muntinlupa.

The additional supply to be

generated from these projects will help to improve supply reliability for some 700,000 Maynilad customers in parts of Manila, Parañaque, Pasay, Muntinlupa, Las Piñas and Cavite.

“As these supply augmentation projects gradually come on stream over the course of the year, we should be able to generate more water supply for distribution to customers. This will cushion the impact of any supply constraints that may arise once the effects of El Niño are felt by the latter part of this

year,” Maynilad president and CEO Ramoncito Fernandez said.

Maynilad is also expecting to recover more water for distribution through its nonrevenue management program that covers active leakage control, selective pipe replacements and the closure of illegal connections, among other activities.

### Demand spikes by 15%

For its part, Manila Water has outlined its plans to help ensure continuous water supply even during hours when the de-

mand for water is at its highest.

The listed firm intends to maximize the 100 MLD capacity of its Cardona Water Treatment Plant, which sources raw water from Laguna Lake.

It will operate standby deep wells to deliver another 115 MLD and run the 15-to-20-MLD Marikina Portable Water Treatment Plant, which can draw and treat water from the Marikina River.

“All these form part of our initiatives toward water security. From day one, it has become our mission to ensure that our

customers continue to receive 24/7 water services, especially during the summer season where demand normally spikes by 15 percent due to higher temperatures,” said Manila Water president and CEO J.V. Emmanuel de Dios.

Manila Water said the construction of the new 15-kilometer aqueduct and 6.4-km tunnel has been completed. This will ensure 1,600 MLD flow toward La Mesa Dam, optimizing the flow of excess water from Ipo to La Mesa Dam. INQ





**EDITORIAL**

## Preparing for El Niño

**W**ith the official weather bureau forecasting an 80-percent probability of El Niño in the coming months, pertinent government agencies have no excuse to dawdle on their job and should now speed up preparations for this catastrophic but expected weather phenomenon. According to the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical, and Astronomical Services Administration, the probability of an El Niño occurrence has increased from 55 percent to 80 percent in June, July, August, and September, with an El Niño alert set to be issued next month.

El Niño, which is caused by the seasonal warming of the Pacific Ocean, upsets normal weather patterns and brings heavy rainfall in some countries, and dry spells and drought in others, including the Philippines. Fishermen from South America first noticed the phenomenon in the 1600s, and noted that it usually occurred toward the Christmas season, hence the name El Niño which refers to the child Jesus. Climate change however has broken that pattern such that El Niño may be expected in other months of the year.

This extreme weather condition has been known to cause the outbreak of diseases, heat stress, and respiratory ailments, as well as wreak devastation on agricultural lands that result in lower crop yields and, consequently, longstanding food shortages. Over the past decade, the Philippines has incurred P463 billion in damages from extreme weather events, 62 percent of that in the agriculture sector. The fisheries sector has not been spared, with warm ocean waters dispersing and driving schools of fish into deeper waters and drastically reducing one's catch. Severe temperatures and lower ocean waters have also exposed and bleached fragile coral reefs, killed plankton, and triggered fish kills. Forest fires, degraded water sources, and other environmental risks can also be expected.

While there's little that humans can do to influence El Niño's onset, duration, and intensity, its severe effects can be mitigated with sound policy interventions, preemptive government actions, and long-term strategies informed by science. Expected to lead these initiatives is the Department of Agriculture (DA), and its acting secretary, President Marcos himself.

So far, the DA has outlined its plans to help the fisheries and agriculture sector cope with El Niño's effects, including putting up more water-related infrastructure such as hydroelectric power plants, irrigation canals, and diversion dams. Small scale irrigation projects would also be developed or rehabilitated, and made available to farmers. The DA also said that it has already identified hybrid varieties of rice and other high value crops that can be planted during dry spells.

All well and good, though it remains to be seen if the agency blamed for spotty policies behind the skyrocketing prices of sugar, rice, and onions could follow through its plans and prove detractors wrong.

For his part, the President could have expounded on his announced plan for the government to slowly convert the country's dependence on water supply from underground to surface water, since conventional wisdom has it that groundwater, being less polluted, is easier and cheaper to treat than surface water. Knowing about the risk of groundwater depletion and the reduction of water in streams and lakes, as well as the deterioration of water quality, should be enough to convince most people to go for it. The plan to help local government units install their own water supply systems should rain prove insufficient is sound, however. As is the executive order that the President said he had signed to create an office to manage the country's water resources.

Just as noteworthy is the mitigation and adaptation plan set up by the Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Unit that includes the promotion of drought-tolerant and early maturing crop varieties, organic fertilizer to increase retention of soil moisture, the adjustment of the planting calendar, and crop shifting.

Small farmers too can actively prepare themselves for the expected drought by following a crop rotation schedule, installing drip irrigation, and shifting from water-intensive to more robust crops that can withstand hotter or drier conditions. They can also reach out to the concerned agencies, like the Bureau of Plant Industry, for technical advice on the right plant varieties, and monitor weather forecasts to be able to plan their planting season accordingly. Commercial establishments and even ordinary households should be encouraged to do their part in conserving water as well, since this precious resource would prove even more limited under the strain of El Niño.

The government too should actively honor its commitments to the Paris Agreement on climate change, and look beyond short-term solutions meant to ease the ill effects of this extreme weather event. Because the bigger picture here is that climate change is getting worse, with El Niño being an early but no less deadly manifestation. Which means no amount of preparation is ever too much.





TITLE:

PAGE

DATE

## Scientists show how climate change affected East Africa's drought

By MOHAMED SHEIKH NOR,  
LAURA MILLAN  
& SIOBHAN WAGNER

**T**HE deadly combination of high temperatures and low rainfall that affected millions in the Horn of Africa was made about 100 times more likely by climate change.

Global warming is altering rain patterns and bringing more heat to southern Somalia, eastern Kenya and southern Ethiopia, according to a study by scientists at the World Weather Attribution network, which seeks to quantify the role of climate change in extreme weather events. Such exceptionally dry conditions have a 5 percent chance of happening in any given year on today's warmer planet.

"People in the Horn of Africa are no strangers to drought, but the duration of this event stretched people beyond their ability to cope," said Cheikh Kane, a policy advisor at the Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre. "Five consecutive seasons of below-normal rainfall, combined with rain-dependent livelihoods and vulnerability multipliers, like conflict and state fragility, have created a humanitarian disaster."

At least 43,000 people died in

Somalia alone last year as a result of the region's worst drought in four decades and some 6.5 million Somalis are expected to face high levels of acute food insecurity, according to the United Nations. The organization is seeking \$2.6 billion in aid for the country, but only 15 percent has been raised. The situation in the Horn of Africa is an example of how developing nations that have emitted a very small amount of the greenhouse gas warming the planet are disproportionately suffering the consequences of rising temperatures.

"The international community must step up and dramatically increase the volume of funds to support Somalia in this moment of difficulty," United Nations Secretary General António Guterres said during a two-day visit to the country earlier this month. "Despite Somalia's zero contributions to climate change, it has become a victim of it."

To determine the role of climate change on this crisis, scientists at WWA analyzed rainfall patterns from January 2021 to December 2022. They also looked at the traditional rainy seasons last year, from March to May and from October to December. Researchers examined the data using a peer-reviewed

scientific method that simulates weather conditions in today's climate, which has warmed 1.2C since pre-industrial times, and in a scenario without any warming.

They concluded that the unusual combination of low rainfall and evaporation of water in the soil and plants—a phenomenon known as evapotranspiration—would not have led to drought at all in world where temperature increases had remained below 1.2C. Specifically, the lower-than-average rains seen between the March and May period were twice as likely because of climate change.

Signs of drought were everywhere in Baidoa, one of the cities Guterres visited in Somalia. Dead tree branches and animal corpses were scattered on the ground. Families forced to move from their villages camped in the city's outskirts in the hopes of finding food and shelter.

Among them was Amina Hassan, a mother of five who walked for eight days to cover the 150 miles to Baidoa from her village. The drought had destroyed her family's livestock and crops.

"Two of my children were nearly dead when I ran into another family heading to the city," she said. "They gave us water which revived

my children."

In recent weeks, sudden rains have led to flooding in some areas, worsening the situation for hundreds of people, according to Gamal Hassan, director of the Center of Excellence for Climate Adaptation and Environmental Protection at IGAD, an intergovernmental organization that's been fighting drought in the region for decades.

"People are very fragile and there's a water management crisis that we need to deal with," Hassan said. "There's a lack of infrastructure to deal with flooding and communities around riverine areas already impacted with crop and livestock destruction. Water-borne diseases are very possible."

The only way forward is a coordinated response across governments in the region and across different sectors, he said. While investments in recent years have improved governments' abilities to respond to climate emergencies in some specific cities or areas, funds remain insufficient to deal with the emergency everywhere.

"We have the reports, we have the information on weather and climate change," Hassan said. "But the capacity, the resources to prepare for flooding and drought are not there." *Bloomberg News*