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**DENR**

# NEWS ALERTS

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE



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## DENR hastens Manila Bay rehabilitation – Cimatú

By Eireene Jairee Gomez

February 6, 2021

THE Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) is working on a comprehensive approach that will expedite the rehabilitation of Manila Bay's coastal and marine ecosystem, which is now in its second year, Secretary Roy Cimatú said.

The DENR's Manila Bay Anti-Pollution Task Force (MBAPTF), which is in charge of the rehabilitation project and Benny D. Antiporda, Environment undersecretary for solid waste management and local government unit concerns, held its first meeting on February 3.

"We have to get down to business and jumpstart the task force as we mark the second year of the Battle for Manila Bay," Cimatú said in a statement.

During the meeting, Antiporda stressed the importance of the task force's work to complement the actions taken by Cimatú as chairman of the MBAPTF.

"The issue of pollution is the core of the Battle for Manila Bay. We are here to provide support to the Secretary and the MBAPTF," he said.

"The main objective is to stop further pollution in the whole of the Manila Bay region. By hook or by crook, we will stop them (polluters). We can defy these environmental issues." Antiporda told task force members.

The MBAPTF is composed of the Manila Bay Coordinating Office, River Basin Control Office, Pasig River Coordinating and Management Office (PRCMO), National Water Resources Board, Laguna Lake Development Authority, and Environmental Management Bureau regional offices in Central Luzon, Calabarzon and National Capital Region. Calabarzon is Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal and Quezon.

Antiporda directed the PRCMO to examine the riverbanks of the Pasig River for illegal drainage pipes and to trace their source from the Laguna de Bay outlet in Napindan Channel all the way to Manila Bay.

The only outlet of Laguna de Bay is the Napindan Channel, which is connected to Manila Bay via the Pasig River.

"Not all of the pipes that you find in the riverbanks or creeks are illegal. Some of those are storm drains," Antiporda noted.



## DENR bumuo ng Manila Bay Anti-Pollution Task Force

By Abante News Online — Last updated Feb 6, 2021

NEWS



Nagtatag ang Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) ng Manila Bay Anti-Pollution Task Force (MBAPTF) na kukumpleto sa mga pamamaraan upang mas mapabilis ang rehabilitasyon at pagpapanumbalik ng coastal at marine ecosystem ng Manila Bay.

Sa isang Special Order No. 2021 – 17 na nilagdaan ni DENR Secretary Roy Cimatu, ang MBAPTF ay pamumunuan ng Undersecretary for Solid Waste management and Local Government Units Concerns (SWMLGUC).

Kasama sa responsibilidad ng task force ay ang sumusunod: Tiyakin ang pagsunod sa lahat ng mga pasilidad ng gobyerno, subdivision, condominium, commercial center, hotel, sports and recreational facilities, hospitals, market places, public buildings, industrial complex at iba pang katulad na mga establisimyento sa Manila Bay Region na may kaugnayan sa umiiral na sewerage system o ang pagtatayo ng kani-kanilang indibidwal na sewerage plant.



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Ayon kay DENR Undersecretary for Solid Waste Management and Local Government Units Concerns Benny Antiporda, malaking hamon ito sa kanilang hanay ang polusyon sa Manila Bay.

“The issue of pollution is the core of the Battle for Manila Bay. We are here to provide support to the Secretary and the MBTF,” pahayag ni Antiporda.

Idinagdag pa niya na pangunahing layunin nito na matigil ang karagdagang polusyon sa Manila Bay.

Upang matiyak ang pagsunod ng mga ito, maglalabas din ng mga kautusan ang kagawaran

sa pagpapataw ng multa, parusa at iba pang mga parusang administratibo. (Mina Navarro)



# Mga illegal pipes na nagtatapon ng maruming tubig, ipinatanggal ng DENR sa riverbanks sa Pasig River

By [RadyoMaN Manila](#) -Feb. 6, 2021 at 10:17am



*Photo Courtesy: Deposit Photos*

Iniyutos ni Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Undersecretary for Solid Waste Management and Local Government Units Concerns Benny Antiporda sa Pasig River Coordinating and Management Office na suyurin ang baybayin o riverbanks sa Pasig River.

Layon nito na matukoy ang mga illegal pipes at ang pinanggagalingan ng duming mula sa Laguna de Bay palabas ng Napindan Channel patungo sa Manila Bay.

Ang nag-iisang labasan sa Laguna de Bay ay ang Napindan Channel na konektado sa Manila Bay sa pamamagitan ng Pasig River.

Inatasan din nito ang Environmental Management Bureau (EMB) na magbigay ng technical assistance sa pamamagitan ng water quality assessment upang matukoy kung ang tubig ay nagmumula sa floodwater o galing sa residential, commercial at industrial establishments.

Kasunod naman ito ng naging pulong ng Manila Bay Anti-Pollution Task Force para kumpletuhin at pabilisin ang implementasyon ng mga pamamaraan sa rehabilitation at restoration ng coastal at marine ecosystem ng Manila Bay.

Source: <https://rmn.ph/mga-illegal-pipes-na-nagtatapon-ng-maruming-tubig-ipinatanggal-ng-denr-sa-riverbanks-sa-pasig-river/?fbclid=IwAR2xj8JMj0mQAQC4EUedfi1DgjvtcDBH3O4LUBvNajPrrYRdgkn9ND79th>



# DENR's Antiporda makes example out of Pampanga open dumpsite

Published February 6, 2021, 1:01 PM

by [Betheena Kae Unite](#)

The shutdown of open dumpsites in the country has begun.

This, after a four-hectare open dumpsite in the middle of a greenfield in Sta. Ana, Pampanga was closed down by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources Friday, February 4.



(Photo via DENR)

After not complying with a previous notice of violation, the dumpsite located in Barangay San Nicolas was finally closed.

“We have already issued a notice of violation so what we’re expecting is that they will finally fix this,” Environment Undersecretary Benny D. Antiporda, who led the closure, said.

However, the dumping of waste ensued despite the notice, he said.

“Sad to say sariwang sariwa yung basura sa likod. Talagang tuloy tuloy yung operations nila na hindi nagbago (Sad to say, you can see the fresh garbage at the back. They really carried on with their operations, they did not change at all),” Antiporda said.

Environment Secretary Roy Cimatu at the start of the year ordered that all open dumpsites must be closed by the end of March this year.

During Friday’s closure operation, the agency was able to confiscate one backhoe, one bulldozer, and three dump trucks. A cease-and-desist order was also issued to the local government unit of Sta. Ana.

“The national government is doing something to wake them up and gigisingin talaga natin sila (and we will definitely wake them up),” the undersecretary said.

He furthered that if needed, the department will file cases against the local government.

“We will run after them, and of course penalize them also para alam nila na hindi na maaring pabayaang usaping basura (for them to realize that the issue on waste should not be neglected),” he said.

A rehabilitation effort for the uncovered dumpsite will follow.

Source: <https://mb.com.ph/2021/02/06/denrs-antiporda-makes-example-out-of-pampanga-open-dumpsite/>



## PH May Soon Ban Plastic Softdrink Straw, Plastic Coffee Stirrer

BY [VILLAGE CONNECT](#) ON FEBRUARY 6, 2021

### ***PH May Soon Ban Plastic Softdrink Straw, Plastic Coffee Stirrer***



The National Solid Waste Management Commission (NSWMC) has approved the plastic softdrink straw and plastic coffee stirrer in the list of non-environmentally acceptable products (NEAP), which may be banned soon as part of the implementation of Republic Act (RA) 9003 or the Ecological Solid Waste Management Act of 2000.

The draft resolution declaring plastic softdrink straw and plastic coffee stirrer as NEAP was deliberated through a virtual en banc meeting on Tuesday (Feb.2), which was presided by Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Undersecretary for Solid Waste Management and Local Government Units (LGUs) Concerns and NSWMC Alternate Chair Benny D. Antiporda. It concluded with 11 votes for approval and three votes for disapproval of the two items.

"I am elated that after 20 years since the birth of RA 9003, the NEAP listing has now commenced. This is long overdue and we need to catch up with the demand of solid waste management in our country," Antiporda said.

He added: "This is a significant milestone for NSWMC, and for the Filipino people. We have long been fighting for and we are committed in having a NEAP list to comply with the law to combat environmental damage."

"The prohibition on these two single-use plastic items may be small steps in the NEAP listing, but it is a big leap when it comes to compliance with the provisions of RA 9003," added Antiporda.

Further, the approved resolution comes at a perfect time as the world celebrates International Straw Free Day on February 3. "This global celebration aims to encourage the public to go straw-free and say "no straw please" when ordering drinks," Antiporda said.

The resolution was passed despite heavy resistance from some members of the Commission, such as the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), the manufacturing and recycling industries.

Other members who participated in the en banc meeting were the Department of Health, Metro Manila Development Authority, Department of the Interior and Local Government, Department of Agriculture, Department of Public Works and Highways, Technical Education and Skills Development Authority, Philippine Information Agency, League of Municipalities of the Philippines, League of Cities of the Philippines, and non-government organizations represented by the EcoWaste Coalition.



Pursuant to Section 29 of RA 9003, "Within one (1) year from the effectivity of this Act, the Commission shall, after public notice and hearing, prepare a list of non-environmentally acceptable products as defined in this Act that shall be prohibited according to a schedule that shall be prepared by the Commission."

However, it was only two decades after the Act was passed when the Commission came up with a list of NEAP.

NSWMC held multi-sectoral consultations on the NEAP list last January 22 and February 1 with 169 and 178 participants, respectively, from the local government units, private sector, and key stakeholders from civil society groups.

The Department of Science and Technology, co-chair of the NSWMC Technical Working Committee, presented the results of its assessment on plastic softdrink straws and plastic coffee stirrers on both days.





# Finally, a ban on single-use plastic straws, stirrers

Published February 6, 2021, 12:14 AM  
by [Manila Bulletin](#)



The National Solid Waste Management Commission (NSWMC) approved last Tuesday a resolution banning plastic soft-drinks straws and plastic stirrers, now commonly used in restaurants in the country. These single-use plastic materials end up in huge volumes in the nation's garbage dumps and eventually in the world's ocean depths, for the simple reason that plastic is not biodegradable and lasts up to 450 years.

The ban is in implementation of Republic Act (RA) 9003, the Ecological Waste Management Act approved on January 26, 2001. That law listed many materials that were filling the nation's garbage dumps, including materials containing toxic additives that threaten human health and the environment.

It might be asked why it took the government 20 years to implement a provision of law approved in 2001. Congress has often been criticized for taking too long to approve urgently needed bills, but that is due to the fact that Congress includes so many clashing interests that it is often difficult to achieve consensus and approval. But it saw the growing threat to the environment as early as 20 years ago when it approved RA 9003.

In this connection, it might be added that Secretary Roy Cimatu of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources three weeks ago ordered the closure of 200 open dumps in the country by March, also in compliance with the same Ecological Waste Management Act of 2001. Some 385 other open dumps in the country had been closed earlier.

Garbage is to be expected in any urban setting but local governments are supposed to provide sanitary landfills, not just open dumps that pose health hazards. Households are also encouraged to recycle reusable materials such as bottles and cardboard boxes. Special attention and treatment is needed for toxic wastes such as those from hospitals.

The ban on plastic straws and stirrers is of special importance worldwide because of their volume and longevity. Millions of these small items are used every day in restaurants all over the world, then dumped after just one use.

Billions of these non-biodegradable plastics have been disposed of in garbage dumps all over the world for over a century and since plastic takes up to 450 years before it disintegrates, they end up in the world's oceans. The ban ordered by the National Solid Waste Management Commission last Tuesday is thus our contribution to the solution of a world problem.



Plastics have been a great invention that saved the world's trees and forests, providing solid and stronger substitutes for use as materials for boxes, bags, clothes, shoes, furniture, household appliances and factory equipment, and construction materials for roads and buildings.

It is hoped that more quickly degradable plastics can be invented so they will cease to be a problem for the environment. Until such time, it is best to end the use of plastics as single-use straws and stirrers to save our environment and the world's oceans.



## Finally, a ban on single-use plastic straws, stirrers

February 6, 2021 | Filed under: Editorial, Opinion | Posted by: Tempo Desk

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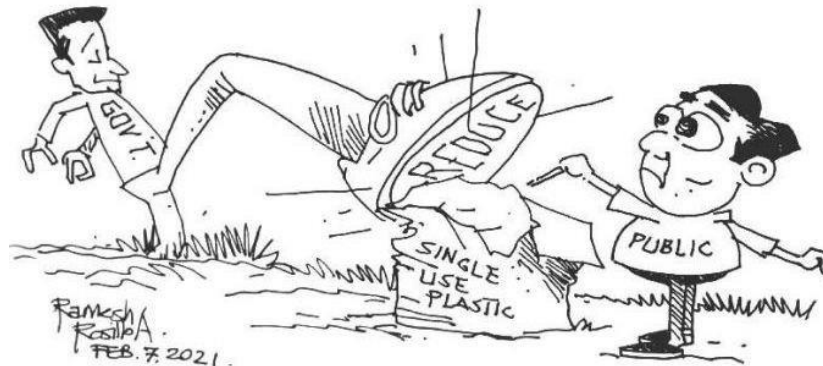
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## EDITORIAL - More needs to be done vs single-use plastic

(The Freeman) - February 7, 2021 - 12:00am



In a laudable move, the National Solid Waste Management Commission recently listed coffee stirrers and plastic straws as among single-use plastic products that are non-environmentally acceptable and have to be phased out.

This means that those items may soon be illegal to use, although the restaurants and coffee shops that have them may still use up their remaining stocks.

There are other single-use items that should be on this list like those sleeves that come with individual apples, those packs that wrap a single orange, and the bags used in those “automated tubig machines” --the list is practically endless.

However, the single-use plastic with the biggest presence in our streets, landfills, and seas is the plastic sachet.

A lot of the things we need for everyday life comes in plastic sachets; soap, shampoo, conditioner, toothpaste, cooking oil, floor wax, body lotion, pet food, condiments, you name it.

Banning some single-use plastic products may not be enough if we want to clean up the environment and prevent floods; we have to wean the people away from their dependence on single-use plastic products, most especially plastic sachets.

Yes, we do realize buying things in sachets makes practical sense, especially to the poorer families who cannot buy items in bulk as well as those who live by themselves and don't need much of anything, but we have to face the reality that many of us --and even in some cases our local government units-- cannot dispose of our plastic trash properly.

Sooner or later they end up where they shouldn't be.

There is an urgent need to reduce our plastic waste now more than ever. We have already mentioned that this pandemic will result in a deluge of discarded plastic products that we had to use to secure ourselves and our loved one from COVID-19 as well as to save those who were infected by it.

If nothing is done to reduce the non-COVID-19 plastic trash already being produced by our growing population, we will soon be facing an environmental crisis.

Source: <https://www.philstar.com/the-freeman/opinion/2021/02/07/2075852/editorial-more-needs-be-done-vs-single-use-plastic/amp/>



# Sasmuan Pampanga Coastal Wetlands: PHL's 8th wetland of international importance

By Jonathan L. Mayuga  
February 7, 2021



*The wooden boardwalk in the Sasmuan Bangkung Malapad Critical Habitat and Ecotourism Area which sits in the heart of the Sasmuan Pampanga Coastal Wetlands. The site is soon to be open to the public.*

The Philippines marked its celebration of the World Wetlands Day on February 2 with the designation of Sasmuan Pampanga Coastal Wetlands (SPCW) as the country's 8th Wetland of International Importance, or Ramsar Site.

The designation of Sasmuan as a Ramsar Site, the first in Central Luzon, was an affirmation of the Philippines's commitment to the Convention on Wetlands, an intergovernmental treaty that provides the framework for national action and international cooperation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources.



## Wetlands and water

Anchored on the theme, "Wetlands and Water," this year's celebration of the World Wetlands Day also marked the 50th anniversary of the Convention on Wetlands, or the Ramsar Convention, to which the Philippines is a signatory.

The Convention was adopted in Ramsar City in Iran, from which it was named, in 1971 and came into force in 1975.

In a statement congratulating the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) in hosting the country's celebration of World Wetlands Day 2021, Convention Secretary-General Martha Rojas Urrego highlighted this year's theme which draws attention to the value of wetlands for freshwater supply.

"The world is facing a growing water crisis with profound consequences and wetlands are at the heart of its resolution," she said.

Urrego added that less than 1 percent of water on the planet is usable freshwater and is stored in wetlands—rivers, streams, lakes, marshes, estuaries and aquifers—underscoring the fact that wetlands are incredibly important source of freshwater.



*Aerial view of the Sasmuan Bangkung Malapad Critical Habitat and Ecotourism Area showing its receiving area and wooden boardwalk.*

“Yet nearly 90 percent of the world’s wetlands have vanished. We are losing wetlands three times faster than forests,” she said.

“It is time to value wetlands for how they contribute to sustainable development and the overall health of the planet,” she pointed out.

## Migratory bird haven

Besides supporting the livelihood of fishermen in the municipality, the Sasmuan wetlands is a 3,500-hectare coastal area straddling four barangays in the town of Sasmuan.

The area is composed of mangrove forests and mudflats—which are certified native and migratory waterbirds magnet flying across continents during migration.

In the Asian Waterbird Census held last month, around 80,000 birds comprising 63 species were counted in Sasmuan.

In a statement on February 3, DENR-Region 3 Executive Director Paquito Moreno Jr. said the designation of the Sasmuan Pampanga Coastal Wetlands as Ramsar Site brought honor to the people of Pampanga and the rest of Central Luzon.

While the area is neither a protected area nor an ecotourism site, it met four of the nine criteria to be declared a Ramsar Site.

“We met Criteria 2 and 3, which means that SPCW supports vulnerable, endangered, or critically endangered species or threatened ecological communities, and play a big role in maintaining the biological diversity of a particular biogeographic region,” Moreno said.

The SPCW also met Criteria 5 and 6 indicating that it regularly supports 20,000 or more waterbirds, and supports 1 percent of the individuals in a population of 1 species or subspecies of waterbirds.

Moremo added that SPCW is a “vital component of our environment and its declaration as Ramsar Site is an integral part of our strategies in cleaning and rehabilitating our Manila Bay.”

## Internationally important

Besides Sasmuan coastal wetlands, the seven other Ramsar Sites in the Philippines are Agusan Marsh Wildlife Sanctuary; Las Piñas-Parañaque Critical Habitat and Ecotourism Area; Naujan Lake National Park; Olango Island Wildlife Sanctuary; Puerto Princesa Subterranean River National Park; Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park; and Negros Occidental Coastal Wetlands Conservation Area.

The DENR’s Biodiversity Management Bureau (BMB) said the wetland areas feature astounding biodiversity and natural beauty.

“They are important livelihood areas for communities living near the sites and are home to different endemic species of flora and fauna as well as migratory birds,” DENR-BMB Acting Director Amelita D.J. Ortiz told the BusinessMirror.



Ortiz said via e-mail on February 1 that despite their importance, wetlands, which practically means waterlogged ecosystems, have been widely misunderstood and paid very little attention to by policymakers worldwide.

## Unappreciated

“Its [wetland] importance and functions, albeit numerous and more than any other types of ecosystem, in terms of the biodiversity and resources it provides, the climate and disaster risks it regulates and, generally, its various services that affect human well-being and quality of life, remain largely unappreciated to the point of being regarded as wastelands,” Ortiz said.

The DENR-BMB Caves, Wetlands and other Ecosystem Division said wetlands include a variety of water bodies and its shores, whether coastal, inland and human-made.

Marshes, swamps, peatlands, lakes, floodplains, rivers, including riparian areas, are inland wetlands. Coastal wetlands include salt marshes, coastal lagoons, mangroves, intertidal flats, seagrass beds, coral reefs, and other marine areas that are not deeper than 6 meters at low tide.

Human-made wetlands include dams, reservoir, rice paddies, fishponds, salt pans and wastewater treatment ponds.

## Important ecosystem

Ortiz said the importance of preserving wetlands cannot be overemphasized.

“Wetlands provide a wide range of ecosystem services essential to human survival, such as food, freshwater and livelihood, rich biodiversity, protection from floods, droughts and other disasters, and store vast amounts of carbon more efficiently than any other natural ecosystem,” she said.

She said particularly important among wetlands are the peatlands, which store twice as much carbon as all the world’s forests.

## Inadequate protection

Having no single Philippine legislation that advances wetland conservation and their wise use, the protection of these very important and unique ecosystems remain very challenging.

The Philippines, is a signatory to the Convention on Wetlands, which entered into force in the country on November 8, 1994.

As a contracting party, it is committed to work toward the adoption and legislation of a national wetland policy.

Yet, for almost 26 years since the accession of the Philippines to the Convention, no legislation has been initiated to serve as a framework to organize and harmonize all legislated laws and policies to attain the wise use of the country’s wetlands and water resources.

“With this fragmented management approach, not all wetlands are equally protected. The degree of their protection depends on the classification or kind of the wetland,” Ortiz explained.

## Fragmented management approach

Wetlands are vulnerable to various threats because of fragmented management approach. Various government agencies have overlapping mandates, one way or the other, over water bodies, said Joy Navarro, chief of the Special Ecosystems Standards Section of Caves, Wetlands and other Ecosystems Division of the DENR-BMB.

“Mangroves, coral reefs and wet caves, for example, have absolute protection from destruction through the Fisheries Code, Forestry Code, or the Caves Act,” Navarro explained.





“However, water bodies that are not considered protected areas or critical habitats under the Enipas [Expanded National Integrated Protected Area Systems], or the Wildlife Act, or as marine protected areas under the Fisheries Code, or are not identified as Environmentally Critical Areas as part of the EIA [environment impact assessment] system, hardly receive legal protection,” she lamented.

## Ongoing initiatives

The DENR-BMB is implementing various programs to protect and conserve the country’s wetlands.

For one, the BMB, through the DENR Regional Field Offices, is implementing the wetlands inventory and database management, profiling and designation of wetlands as national and international importance, critical habitat and as protected areas.

It also works with several nongovernment organizations and private agencies for various wetland conservation programs.

For the protection and conservation of peatlands in Agusan Marsh Wildlife Sanctuary, the DENR-BMB is working with telecommunications company Philippine Long Distance Telephone.

Recently, for the Boracay rehabilitation, the DENR-BMB partnered with Aboitiz Equity Ventures, JG Summit, Boracay Tubi System Inc., Energy Development Corp. and San Miguel Corp.

## Wetlands-rich PHL

In 2016, the DENR-BMB published the first edition of Atlas of Philippine Inland Wetlands and Classified Caves, accounting for a total of 314 wetlands, both inland and human-made, 2,487 rivers and river systems, and 416 classified caves all over the country.

These cover a total area of 22,370.06 square kilometers (km<sup>2</sup>).

For coastal and marine wetlands, the Philippines has a total of 18,541.99 km<sup>2</sup>, while inland wetlands are pegged at 3,667.37 km<sup>2</sup>.

At the same time, the DENR-BMB was counted a total of 160.70 km<sup>2</sup> of man-made wetlands across the country.

## LGUs’ role

The DENR-BMB is banking on strong partnership and collaboration with various institutions, particularly local government units (LGUs) to protect wetlands within their jurisdiction.

Intensifying awareness-raising and increasing the capacity of LGUs to mainstream wetlands conservation is the main key to encourage them in protecting our wetlands, Navarro said.

“It is also important to make them realize that protecting wetlands means providing their people long-term benefits from them, such as protection from the adverse impact of typhoons, flood, drought and other natural calamities, sustainable livelihood and source of food and water,” Navarro said.

## Wetland loss

The global wetland loss and degradation, according to the DENR-BMB, continues faster than other ecosystems.

Historically, throughout the world, the DENR-BMB said wetlands have often been mistakenly regarded as “wastelands” because they are wet, soggy, muddy areas that bred mosquitoes, flies, diseases and had unpleasant odors.

Because wetlands were not productive for traditional needs, such as shelter or agricultural production, they were thought of as places to avoid and, in many cases, eliminate.



These, the DENR-BMB believes, are factors why large areas of wetlands were drained and converted for other land uses, such as housing developments and farmland.

Navarro said the country's wetland has lost so much and continues to lose some more at an alarming rate under growing pressures of land use, pollution, drainage and other reasons, aggravated by the changing climate.

## Stronger protection

In a telephone interview on February 1, Navarro said the designation of wetlands of international importance is one way of highlighting their significance to promote awareness and rally support from various sectors, including policy-makers, decision-makers, LGUs, the private sector and local communities.

For instance, she said in the case of Sasmuan Pampanga Coastal Wetlands, a stronger policy regime is expected to be put in place now that it is recognized for its international importance.

“This is an international recognition that the Sasmuan Pampanga Coastal Wetlands is important internationally. If it is important internationally, it is important also for the Philippines to protect it,” she said.

The DENR-BMB, she said, will now include the newly designated Ramsar Site as a priority wetland in implementing various programs.

“Since it now has international recognition, there will be a sense of pride and, hopefully, increased awareness among local communities, but also policy-makers like lawmakers from their area—for important legislation,” she said.

Image credits: [DENR-3 PAO/Don Guevarra](#)

# Sasmuan is haven for birds, mangroves

By: [Tonette Orejas](#) - [@ttorejasINQ](#)

[Philippine Daily Inquirer](#) / 05:00 AM February 07, 2021

SASMUAN, Pampanga —Jayson Salenga, one of the country’s two youth ambassadors for wetlands, has reason to be happy that his hometown Sasmuan in Pampanga province dropped its Spanish name, Sexmoan, by way of legislation in 1991.

The association with sex—unintended due to pronunciation and spelling—was removed when Congress passed Republic Act No. 6976, through the support of then Pampanga Rep. Emigdio Lingad.

It reverted to the precolonial name Sasmuan, which was derived from “sasa,” or nipa palm, and “pitabuan,” or where the chieftains of the old Kingdom of Baba (the present-day Lubao town) met.

So when British singer Tom Jones’ “Sexbomb” topped the music charts in 1999, Salenga said Sasmuan had only its fresh seafood to be proud of; no more sex joke to worry about.

“The change of name distinguished Sasmuan as a coastal wetland,” Salenga, also the town’s tourism officer, told the Inquirer.

Its importance was solidified on Feb. 2 after the nearly 4,000-hectare Sasmuan Pampanga Coastal Wetlands (SPCW) was designated a “wetland of international importance” under various criteria of the Ramsar Convention, a treaty by 171 countries that committed to protect wetlands as sources of fresh water and other resources.

The designation of SPCW as Ramsar Site 2445 was in time for the 50th year of the convention, which was enacted in Ramsar, Iran, in 1971.

The SPCW passed four of nine criteria, according to Paquito Moreno Jr., executive director of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) in Central Luzon.



**SUPPORTING LIFE** The Sasmuan Bangkung Malapad Critical Habitat and Ecotourism Area, at the heart of Sasmuan Pampanga Coastal Wetlands in Pampanga province, not only sustains populations of migratory birds but provides alternative livelihood to the local fishing community through ecotourism activities. —PHOTO COURTESY OF DENR  
CENTRAL LUZON

## Stopover points

On its website, the Ramsar Convention secretariat said SPCW served as “important stopover points” for migratory waterbirds on the East Asian-Australasian Flyway.

In 2020, it said 50,000 birds were counted in the area. Threatened bird species seen there were Nordmann’s or spotted greenshank (*Tringa guttifer*), black-faced spoonbill (*Platalea minor*) and far eastern curlew (*Numenius madagascariensis*).



The January 2021 Asian Waterbird Census showed SPWC as a thriving home. The census counted 80,000 migratory birds from 63 species, according to Laudemir Salac, head of the DENR in Pampanga.

The Ramsar website said “aquaculture ponds cover large parts of the site, helping to support local livelihoods.” But disputes over land and water do occur, evident in several signs that warn against trespassing.

SPCW also hosts the vulnerable mangrove species, *Avicennia rumphiana*, and the more common species, *Sonneratia alba*.



GUIDING TOURISTS Genaro Mercado, when he is not out fishing, uses his boat to bring tourists to Sasmuan’s coastal attractions. —TONETTE OREJAS

### Supporting communities

But 52-year-old fisherman Genaro Mercado has a vague sense of the Ramsar Convention. He has yet to grasp how being a Ramsar site will affect his village, its environment or his own family.

The Bangkung Malapad, a wide patch of mangroves far down his village of Sebitanan, is the closest thing that can get Mercado to understand how the preservation of wetlands can support people. It is officially called the Sasmuan Bangkung Malapad Critical Habitat and Ecotourism Area.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic struck in March last year, Mercado earned P2,500 from tourists who rented his boat for a two-way ride to Bangkung Malapad. Back then, he averaged five round trips a month.

Mercado also observed an increase in his weekly catches of crabs and shrimps just outside Bangkung Malapad. The 405-ha mangroves strip is the heart of the 3,667-ha SPCW, Salac said.

Batang Dos is the nearest village to Bangkung Malapad, which older residents called Pulong Malapad, a wide mudflat that could be seen when the tides of Manila Bay were low, barangay chair Amanda Guevarra-Coronel said.

### Protection for village

“I was a barangay health worker back in the day. In the times of three previous mayors after Mt. Pinatubo erupted [on June 15, 1991], we always planted mangroves. Department of Agriculture and DENR workers always helped us,” she recalled.

Salac said rain washed down Mt. Pinatubo’s ash, sand and mud from the slopes to the Pasac River, and accumulated at the mouth of the bay, making it hospitable for mangroves, plants, birds and aquatic life.

Coronel said mangroves reforestation should be done in the SPCW because mangroves are not only spawning grounds for fish or refuge to migratory and local birds.



MANGROVE SHADE The mangrove forest at Bangkung Malapad provides shade for visitors exploring the area. —  
TONETTE OREJAS

“In many times, the mangroves protect our village from strong winds. That is also a reason why we protect the mangroves,” she said.

Batang Dos residents could benefit from practicing sustainable fishing practices, selling their catch, tour-guiding or earning from homestay.

Salenga said the local government had banned “bonbon,” or the use of mangroves branches as artificial reefs.

The local government has also established a 5-ha mangroves nursery and 5-ha fish sanctuary in Barangay San Antonio in 2016.

“Protecting and maintaining a Ramsar site is not an easy and simple task. We have to raise awareness. We have to help them sustain practices that do good to the environment and help them stop bad practices,” Salenga said.

He added: “The people should take care of the wetlands to make the wetlands support people.”



WINGED VISITORS The far eastern curlew, photographed on Olango Island in Cebu province, has also been seen in Sasmuan’s wetlands. Photo on top shows spoonbills documented in Bangkung Malapad in January 2019. —PHOTOS  
COURTESY OF MADS BAJARIAS



## Conservation

Salac said the other ways of enforcing environmental laws and reporting on conservation work would be discussed in village meetings.

Candaba Mayor Rene Maglanque said he was interested in making the Candaba Swamp a Ramsar site because it hosts many species of migratory birds.

Swamp areas that cross the borders of the provinces of Pampanga, Nueva Ecija and Bulacan are mostly privately owned, making enforcement a big challenge, Salac said.

The designation of SPCW as a Ramsar site was endorsed by the DENR's Biodiversity Management Bureau ahead of World Wetlands Day on Feb. 2.

After the Philippines committed to the Ramsar Convention in 1994, the country now has eight wetlands of international importance covering 247,864 ha.

The SPCW is in the league of the Agusan Marsh Wildlife Sanctuary in Agusan del Sur province, Las Piñas-Parañaque Critical Habitat and Ecotourism Area in Metro Manila, Naujan Lake National Park in Oriental Mindoro province, and Negros Occidental Coastal Wetlands Conservation Area in Negros Occidental province.

Also on the list are the Olango Island Wildlife Sanctuary in Cebu province, Puerto Princesa Subterranean River National Park and the Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park, both in Palawan province.

According to Martha Rojas Urrego, secretary-general of the Ramsar Convention, the world is "in a water crisis with profound consequences and wetlands are at the heart of its resolution." Less than 1 percent of water on earth is usable fresh water and is mostly stored in wetlands, such as rivers, streams, lakes, marshes, estuaries and aquifers, she said.

"We consume at least 10 billion tons of fresh water daily—more than the earth can replenish. Yet, we will require 55 percent more water by 2050 for a global population of 10 billion people," Urrego said on the Ramsar website.

According to her, "significant investments are required in wetlands as natural solutions for water management, as well as enacting policies that integrate wetlands into management plans."

"All are decisive actions, toward a green economy and paramount to building back better," Urrego said.



## MaCEA, PLDT-Smart collaborate for environmental stewardship

By [BusinessMirror](#)

February 7, 2021



*PLDT-Smart and MaCEA walkway mural*

The country's largest integrated telecommunications company PLDT Inc. (PLDT) and its wireless subsidiary, Smart Communications Inc. (Smart), have partnered with the Makati Commercial Estate Association (MaCEA) to expand the PLDT-Smart Gabay Kalikasan street mural of internationally renowned and multi-awarded environmental "artist" AG Saño.

Aimed at raising awareness on climate change, Saño's initial artwork in December 2019 featured more than 3,000 square feet of Philippine flora and fauna throughout the telco headquarter's Legazpi Street frontage and De la Rosa Street walkway, a PLDT-Smart news release said.



*AG Saño returned to extend the PLDT-Smart Gabay Kalikasan mural that was initially completed in March 2020.*

The street mural's second phase, completed in March 2020, was a 120-foot tall vertical piece at its Gallardo back entrance, and is said to be the tallest environmental mural in Southeast Asia.

Completed right before the end of January 2021, the mural extension on the Legazpi-De la Rosa elevated walkway continued the existing mural theme around the PLDT building, which featured armored bird species all found in the Philippines.

"The general state of the environment did not improve in 2020. Wildlife population is still diminishing. As environmental street artists, we want to keep on creating images of nature to keep nature's beauty in the consciousness of the daily urban pedestrian," Saño said.

With the mural, MaCEA aims to constantly transform and reinvent itself to remain relevant and interesting while raising awareness on the environment.

Makati's civic body aims to make the central business district pedestrian-friendly and well connected, celebrating its distinct neighborhood, transforming it into an art center and helping redevelop it further into a vibrant central business district.



As the country's largest integrated telecommunications company, with energy as a necessary resource to deliver their services, PLDT actively ensures that it uses energy responsibly.

As greenhouse-gas emissions arise from energy consumed by its network in operation, in the establishments they run, and emissions from transport, PLDT aims to protect the planet through technology-based carbon footprint offsetting programs.

This includes initiatives in reforestation, marine protection, mangroves preservation, and peatlands conservation that leverage on digital innovations and PLDT-Smart's network.

Gabay Kalikasan represents PLDT-Smart's Effective Environmental Stewardship sustainability pillar, one of the seven that make up the company's Sustainability Framework.

The other pillars are Awesome Customer Experience and Quality of Service, Growth-driven Innovation, Responsible and Efficient Operations, Excellence through Human Capital, Positive Community Impact, and Good Governance & Ethical Business Practices, the news release said.

The mural extension is supported by Metro Pacific Investments Corp.





## US, PHL sign P7.25-billion pact for environment protection

By [BusinessMirror](#)

February 7, 2021



*The new USAID-Neda agreement helps protect the Philippines' world-renowned natural treasures while improving the lives of Filipinos who promote sustainable natural resource management, expanding access to renewable energy, and helping communities reduce the effects of natural disasters.*

The US government, through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and the Philippine National Economic and Development Authority (Neda) signed a new, five-year bilateral assistance agreement valued at more than P7.25 billion (\$150 million) to protect the Philippine environment.

Through the agreement, the United States and the Philippines deepen their commitment to protect the environment by promoting the sustainable use of natural resources, expanding access to renewable energy, and reducing risks from natural disasters, a US Embassy news release said.

In partnership with national, provincial and local governments, USAID will implement projects to increase access to clean energy and water; improve natural resource management; and protect the Philippines' landscapes, wildlife, and fisheries.

These projects support the Philippines's and United States's shared goal of preserving the Philippines's world-renowned natural treasures while improving the lives of Filipinos and ensuring sustainable jobs.

"This new agreement with Neda, which includes partnerships with the Departments of Natural Resources, Energy, and Agriculture-Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources, marks a new era in our longstanding support to the Philippines," said USAID Philippines Mission Director Lawrence Hardy II. "We will work together to address many environmental challenges. Together, we will strengthen government and community efforts in responding to environmental challenges to achieve our shared vision for safer and more resilient Filipino communities. Our assistance will help protect the forests, fisheries, and water and energy resources for millions of Filipinos, increase livelihoods, and promote nature as an engine of sustainable growth," Hardy added.

The bilateral agreement is one of four new, five-year USAID-government of Philippines Development Assistance Agreements launching in 2020 and 2021, with an anticipated total value of P32.7 billion (\$675 million) over the next five years.

The other new agreements include with the Departments of Health, Finance, and Education. Over the past 20 years, USAID has provided over P216 billion (\$4.5 billion) to advance the country's development goals, the news release said.

Source: <https://businessmirror.com.ph/2021/02/07/us-phl-sign-p7-25-billion-pact-for-environment-protection/>



# Dominguez welcomes US plan to reenter Paris Agreement

By Roderick Abad

February 7, 2021



THE Department of Finance (DOF) has welcomed the plan of the United States (US) to join again in an international accord to address the climate crisis.

In a statement posted at the DOF portal, Finance Secretary Carlos Dominguez III was pleased by the announcement of US President Joseph Biden that the superpower nation will reenter the Paris Agreement on climate change.

The landmark international pact was signed in 2015 to address global warming. The US abandoned the climate agreement in 2020 after former President Donald Trump ordered the country's withdrawal.

According to the DOF chief, Biden's move is a welcome development after President Rodrigo Duterte repeatedly called on all countries to act immediately on the climate crisis as one community under the international pact.

He also stated that more efforts are needed to guarantee the generation of the \$100 billion annual funding goal in the Paris Agreement for the adaptation and reduction needs of developing countries like the Philippines.

"Now, more than ever, we need to ensure the mobilization of finance flows toward the adaptation needs of our most vulnerable communities. We need such action to be faster and on a greater scale. And we need it to bring about effective solutions on the ground across the globe," Dominguez said.

He suggested that developed nations "must deliver on their commitments to the Paris Agreement" to secure climate justice, including assistance to developing economies resulting to "low-carbon and sustainable development".

Dominguez mentioned the ensuing Covid-19 pandemic in his statement as "a stark reminder that health, economic stability and nature are intertwined," adding that it has demonstrated the "domino effect" that was caused "when one element in this interconnected system is overturned."

The firm and earnest response to the unprecedented health crisis, the Finance secretary said, revealed the exceptional capability of the society to put the emergency brake on the "business-as-usual" way of thinking.

"It showed that we can act as one and radically change our ways and our systems to fight the scourge of a deadly virus for the greater good of all," read his statement. "The same unity, resolve, and sense of urgency should be applied in combating the climate emergency and pursuing low-carbon and sustainable development."

Source: <https://businessmirror.com.ph/2021/02/07/dominguez-welcomes-us-plan-to-reenter-paris-agreement/>



# Digging for victory in the Phl

Published 4 hours ago on February 7, 2021 02:30 AM

By [TDT](#) [@tribunephil](#)



PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF UN Farmers working with The Cacao Project, founded by 2019 Champion of the Earth Louise Mabulo, learn sustainable techniques to help them cope with climate change.

Some farming techniques can have a devastating and negative effect on the environment, as farmers seek to harvest the maximum amount of produce from their land, but the efforts of a Filipino chef and activist are demonstrating that, with the right approach, agriculture can help to regenerate land, offer protection from the effects of climate change and extreme weather, and improve livelihoods.

Louise Mabulo has been recognized as a prodigy of the culinary world since the age of 12, when she appeared on the Filipino version of the TV show Junior Masterchef. Since then, she has won several awards for her cooking, and has become a world-renowned social activist.

Mabulo, a 2019 UN Environment Programme (UNEP) Young Champion of the Earth, is the founder of The Cacao Project, which works to improve the livelihoods of Filipino farmers in the Bicol Region, by reviving barren lands through tree planting, creating economic forests and nurseries, and promoting fair trade and reforestation.

“As a chef, I am frequently in contact with farmers. These discussions gave me a good insight into the problems with the food system in the Philippines — where there are gaps, and where there is over-supply.”

“This prompted me to start farm-to-table dinners, using only local ingredients.

When Bicol region was hit hard by a typhoon, I began a relief effort for farmers, but I realized that this could only have a superficial effect on their lives, so I oriented my career towards agriculture,” she said.

“The Philippines is one of the countries that is most severely affected by climate change — since September of last year, we have been struck by three typhoons and, in Bicol, where I’m from, 400 homes were destroyed.”



## Grass of Life

Iconic Filipino bamboo eyed for sustainable greening of Mindanao's watersheds

By Manuel Cayon

February 7, 2021



WHO would ever have thought that the iconic, taken-for-granted and once-ubiquitous bamboo could rise beyond the thatched nipa huts of the countryside, common benches and side chairs peddled in many Philippine cities and towns, and simple support poles in small construction projects and banana plantations?

At a common government service facility in coastal Naawan town of Misamis Oriental, new furniture designs are coming out of this community endeavor and have given a pleasant surprise to even the Mindanao Development Authority (MinDA), which sees the common bamboo of the grass family as the likely main material for a sustainable and environment-friendly greening of many watersheds of Mindanao.



"The common service facility now produces high-end furniture and school desks made out of bamboo, mostly the Giant Bamboo variety," said Secretary Emmanuel Piñol, chief of the MinDA.

The former chief of the Department of Agriculture (DA) visited the facility along with Mayor Dennis Roa early this month, and reported seeing high-quality bamboo products which were manually made in the common service facility by the local people themselves.

He said Mayor Roa is now actually on the search for a talented furniture designer who could help the local bamboo furniture makers build attractive and commercially viable products.

### Not just for greening

MinDA has its own long-term plan to resuscitate many watershed areas of Mindanao to address constant flooding of the lowlands and minimize other environmental destruction, such as landslides and droughts.

The plan of MinDA's Green Mindanao Project is also to reduce poverty among the Indigenous People's (IP) communities "whose ancestral domains are minimally utilized for agricultural production."

Upon seeing the products churned out at the service facility in the town of Naawan, Piñol said improved processing of bamboo would do more than providing simple livelihood to planters. Bamboo may also offer economic opportunities to communities around these processing centers.



Naawan, a fourth-class municipality in Northern Mindanao, is already reaping big gains from its small bamboo processing facility to improve the lives of its upland farmers, Piñol added.

The facility is located in the town's Economic Enterprise Center established two years ago with financial support from the Department of Trade and Industry and MinDA. For now, the center still needs additional tools and equipment for furniture making.

## Industry council

Also in Bukidnon, a private company established recently a bamboo processing facility in the capital of Malaybalay City.

Piñol said the Bukidnon Giant Bamboo Resources Corp. (BGB) established post-harvest facilities for bamboo "to treat, dry and process into slats, while doing integrated production from plantation to manufacturing of finished engineered bamboo products, such as lumber/beams and boards, building materials (doors, jambs, mouldings, etc.) and furniture using the most modern technology in the wood-working industry."

Roderico R. Bioco, the BGB chairman, briefed him about the bamboo processing facility, after which he and Bioco "agreed to work on organizing the Mindanao Bamboo Industry Development Council to fully utilize the facilities and in the process boost the development of bamboo farming in Mindanao."

Bioco had told him that starting with its bamboo innovation center in Aglayan, BGB expanded postharvest and manufacturing facilities in the Bukidnon towns of Impasugong, Talakag, Cabanglasan and Manolo Fortich and Claveria in Misamis Oriental.

"Core to the advocacy of BGB is engaging individual farmers and IP communities to expand bamboo propagation as an alternative source of income while able to address environmental concerns, especially the REDD+ program of our government to meet GHG emission reduction commitment under the Paris Agreement. BGB is also pursuing its own bamboo plantation," Bioco said in a text message sent to Piñol.

"Our aim is to create a solid corporate platform of Environment, Social and Governance (ESG) to address at least seven of the 17 SDGs, reforest 100,000 hectares, mitigate the impact of global warming, improve water security and uplift the living standard of 100,000 families," Bioco added.

Piñol said the council would form part of MinDA's Industry Development Philosophy, "which aims to develop agriculture and fisheries by organizing and uniting the stakeholders who will be assisted through financing and market access by MinDA and its partners."

He said the council would promote the greening of Mindanao's critical watersheds and headwaters and, at the same time, provide income opportunities for the people. The original plan has included planting of bamboo as well as fruit trees and harvestable trees, "including the very valuable Agar Tree, in the denuded highlands of Mindanao," Piñol said.

Meanwhile, last year, the DA in the Caraga Region said it has conducted a ceremonial bamboo planting to commemorate World Bamboo Day in September while continuing to pursue the DA's program to promote its planting and propagation.

Regional Director Abel James I. Monteagudo was accompanied by his technical director, Nicandro M. Navia Jr., and acting technical director Rebecca R. Atega to the ceremonial planting at the Del Monte Lowland Rainfed Research Station (DMLRRS).

## Value-added crop

IN February last year, Agriculture Secretary William D. Dar declared bamboo as a high-value crop to intensify its promotion.



In a news statement, Dar said the DA's new agri-industrial strategy "does not only look at enhancing farm productivity, but also [at] developing more value-added products to further empower farmers by providing them with more business and employment opportunities, and eventually additional income."

The DA said that aside from food products, bamboo is also used for construction, furniture, handicraft industry, fuel, textiles and the arts.

"Ecologically, compared to other trees, bamboo absorbs two times more carbon dioxide, which is essential for the survival, growth and reproduction of living things. Bamboo plants also have strong roots, which make it quite useful in preventing soil erosion," the department said.

In Caraga, the DMLRRS is targeting to produce 1,000 pieces of bamboo planting materials to interested farmers.

Image credits: [Mokona73](#) | [Dreamstime.com](#), [Jameserwindamit](#) | [Dreamstime.com](#)



Members of the Hijos del Nazareno guide Catholic faithfuls as they attend the first Friday mass for the month on Feb. 5, 2021, at the Minor Basilica of the Black Nazarene in Manila before dawn.

The STAR/Miguel de Guzman

# With 1,941 new infections, COVID-19 tally in the Philippines rises to 535,521

(Philstar.com) - February 6, 2021 - 4:00pm

MANILA, Philippines — Coronavirus cases in the Philippines climbed to 535,521 on Saturday after the Department of Health logged 1,941 new infections.

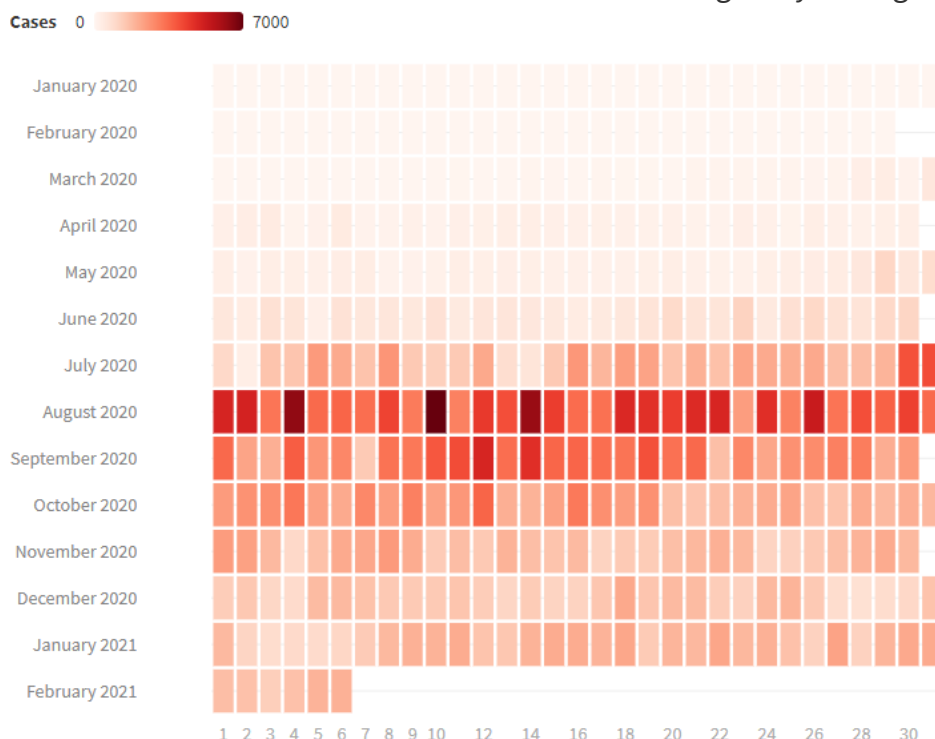
Of the total number of cases, 35,946 or 6.7% are marked as active by the DOH.

Another 234 people reportedly beat the virus, bringing the total number of recoveries to 488,465

But the death toll rose to 11,110 after 52 more succumbed to the disease.

## COVID-19 cases in the Philippines

The Philippines recorded the most number of COVID-19 cases in a single day on August 10, 2020.



Source: Department of Health • As of February 6, 2021, 4 p.m.



## What's new?

- Local health authorities on Friday said they detected [eight more cases of the new and more transmissible COVID-19 variant](#) first identified in the United Kingdom, bringing the running total to 25.
- Filipinos will be [among the first to receive coronavirus vaccines](#) from the World Health Organization-led COVAX facility, the British Embassy Manila said Friday. Of the around 10 million jabs set to arrive on or before March, it added, a majority will be AstraZeneca vaccines which are 70% effective.
- The Department of Foreign Affairs' tally of countries and territories where Filipinos have contracted coronavirus rose to 86 this week after it added another entry. On Friday, the agency revealed that the new report came from "a country in the Americas" but did not offer any further identification.

— **Bella Perez-Rubio with a report from Xave Gregorio**





## UK variant cases rise to 25

### Eight more virus infections traced; Customs says no fake vaccines in PH

posted February 07, 2021 at 01:40 am

by [Willie Casas](#)

Following the sustained biosurveillance efforts of the government, the Department of Health, the University of the Philippines-Philippine Genome Center (UP-PGC) and the UP-National Institutes of Health have confirmed the detection of eight additional COVID-19 cases positive for the B.1.1.7 or United Kingdom variant.

This brings the total B.1.1.7 variant cases in the country to 25. The DOH, UP-PGC, and UP-NIH further reported that no other variant of concern had been detected, the DOH said in its latest update report on the UK variant posted Friday night.

Three of the eight additional cases are from Bontoc, Mountain Province. Of the three cases, two females aged 25 and 54 were identified as close contacts of a previously reported B.1.1.7 variant case who is part of the Bontoc cluster.

The third case is a 31-year-old male whose link to the Bontoc cluster is still being verified. To date, the 54-year-old female has recovered, while the remaining two are active cases and are currently being managed.

Meanwhile, two additional cases are from La Trinidad, Benguet. One of the two cases is a 15-year-old female and relative of the previously identified B.1.1.7 variant case in La Trinidad. She is currently asymptomatic and in isolation as part of the management of contacts of the first B.1.1.7 variant case identified in La Trinidad.

The other case is an 84-year-old male who had no known history of travel nor contact with any B.1.1.7 variant case and is part of a separate cluster of cases in the city. The said case was recorded to have died last January 24, 2021.

Moreover, two of the additional B.1.1.7 variant cases are Returning Overseas Filipinos (ROF). The first is a 29-year-old female who arrived from UAE on January 7, 2021 aboard Philippine Airlines flight PR 659. The second is a 54-year-old male with a reported local address in Talisay, Cebu. Both cases of ROF have since recovered.

#### No seizures

Meanwhile, the Bureau of Customs said there were no unauthorized COVID-19 vaccines so far in the Philippines despite reports of alleged illegal vaccination in the country.

Customs Spokesperson Vincent Philip Maronilla said the agency had intensified screening the national borders for the entry of smuggled coronavirus vaccine jabs, with the seaports and airports on "red alert."

"There are] no seizures yet of any illicit or unauthorized vaccines . . . We have beefed up capability to screen imports for the fake vaccines, but they will in no way hamper the arrival of the legit vaccine," Maronilla told ANC in an interview.

Under the Food and Drug Administration law, the importation, sale and administering of unregistered vaccines should result in a penalty of a fine or imprisonment, but health officials earlier said they did not have information yet to hold anyone accountable.

#### Legit vaccines

Pharmaceutical companies, Maronilla said, have nominated their own logistics partners that would claim the vaccine upon its arrival.

"We have [a] point person and one stop shop. We also have the DND (Department of National Defense), NBI (National Bureau of Investigation) tracing the necessary permits of alleged counterfeit vaccines that have arrived in the country," he explained.

Documents and permits will also be screened to make sure that the vaccines are original and approved by the FDA. A vaccine with no emergency use authorization from the FDA will also be prohibited from entering the border.

The bureau also upgraded X-ray machines that could check the identifying marks of the legitimate vaccines. Vaccine doses



Meanwhile, the Philippines is set to receive 10 million doses of COVID-19 vaccine from the COVAX Facility, most of which are manufactured by Oxford-AstraZeneca, British Ambassador to Manila Daniel Pruce announced on Friday.

Pruce said Britain funded about 548 million pounds in the COVAX Advance Market Commitment, which would help distribute vaccines under the alliance to up to 92 developing countries, including the Philippines.

“The Facility expects doses will be available for delivery starting in the first quarter of 2021, perhaps as early as February, that pending the emergency use listing from the WHO (World Health Organization),” he said in a statement.

COVAX is co-led by Gavi, the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), and WHO.

#### New cases

The Philippines logged on Saturday 1,941 new cases of coronavirus disease 2019, bringing the total cases to 535,521, as four laboratories failed to submit their data on time, the Department of Health reported.

The DOH also reported 35,946 active cases. Of the active cases 88.4 percent are mild; 6.8 percent are asymptomatic; 2.2 percent are critical; 2.1 percent are severe; and 0.48 percent are moderate.

Moreover, 42 cases that were previously tagged as recovered were reclassified as deaths after final validation.

The DOH said that, nationwide, 60 percent of the total ICU bed capacity are available; 66 percent of the total isolation bed capacity are available; 76 percent of the total ward bed capacity are available; and 78 percent of the total ventilators are available.

#### Vaccination priority

Given the limited global supply of vaccines for COVID-19, the Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases has adopted the prioritization framework and criteria of the Interim National Immunization Technical Advisory Group in allocating first tranches of vaccines against COVID-19 that will arrive in the country.

“Of course, our goal with the vaccination is to vaccinate every Filipino as directed by the President. However, we recognize that we are working under the context of limited global supply of the COVID-19 vaccine, which is why the IATF has resolved to adopt this prioritization framework to ensure that those who have the highest risk of exposure and death will be protected from the disease,” Health Secretary Francisco Duque III said.

With aims of reducing COVID-19 morbidity and mortality, preserving health system capacity, protecting the populations most at-risk to the disease, slowing down COVID-19 transmission rate, and minimizing social and economic disruptions, the resolution prioritizes frontline workers in the national and local health facilities.

The framework further lists vulnerable groups—like senior citizens and those with comorbidities—as the next priority for vaccination and provides for sub-prioritization based on risk exposure or mortality risk and the process flow that citizens will undergo in the vaccination program.

#### Indemnification fund

While lawmakers have yet to pass a law mandating an indemnification fund for people who might experience the possible adverse effects of COVID-19 vaccines, Secretary Duque III on Friday commended all local government units that have set aside a local compensation fund for their constituents.

“They are not precluded from doing that but let me underscore that we have submitted to both houses of Congress the proposed bill – an indemnification fund legislation,” Duque said at a press conference in Parañaque City. “I commend all the LGUs who are already, on their own, setting aside funds to indemnify people who might suffer from severe adverse reactions following immunization.”

The local governments of Marikina, Pasay, and Makati have announced their plans to set aside funds to compensate their constituents who would possibly experience severe adverse reactions from the COVID-19 vaccines.



# PH gets 10M vaccine doses, mostly AstraZeneca under COVAX: envoy

By Joyce Ann L. Rocamora February 6, 2021, 8:53 am



*(Photo courtesy of Anadolu)*

**MANILA** – The Philippines is set to receive 10 million doses of Covid-19 vaccine from the COVAX Facility, most of which are manufactured by Oxford-AstraZeneca, British Ambassador to Manila Daniel Pruce announced on Friday.

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COVAX is co-led by Gavi, the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), and WHO.

It is aimed at accelerating the development and manufacture of Covid-19 vaccines and guaranteeing fair and equitable access across the world, especially for low- and middle-income economies.

Pruce said the UK remains one of Gavi's largest donors.

"This is part of our commitment to supporting countries around the world to get equitable access to Covid vaccines as part of their response to the coronavirus pandemic," he said. **(PNA)**



## 'Make peace with nature'

January marked the beginning of what many within the United Nations and beyond view as "the most critical decade of our lives," the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) said, launching a major initiative to protect the world's oceans through the next ten years.

UNESCO marked the start of the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development, with a global online event headlined: "A Brave New Ocean." It aims to raise awareness of the immense challenges and opportunities the world seas provide to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).

"At the beginning of the third millennium, oceanography has the capacity to identify problems and offer solutions, provided we stop neglecting its contribution," UNESCO chief Audrey Azoulay said, ahead of the event.

While 2021 has already been dubbed a "super year" for the ocean, UNESCO maintained that it signaled the launch of the UN's own "massive commitment to our Blue Planet."

The Ocean Decade will provide a 'once-in-a-lifetime' opportunity for nations to work together to generate the global ocean science needed to support the sustainable development of our shared ocean, according to UNESCO.

The first community store was opened by former residents from Taliptip's Sitio Kinse, who moved to Barangay Bambang, also in Bulakan town. They opened the pilot store for the SMC program last 24 January.

SMC provided the initial inventory of Magnolia Chicken and Purefoods products for free, as well as freezers for the said community store.

The former Sitio residents, led by Teodoro Bacon, Rodel Alvarez, Primitivo Canceran, Roberto Bantigue, Jose Roger Requinto, also recently received land ownership titles



PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF UN

SCHOOL of fish in Quintana Roo, on the Yucatán Peninsula's Caribbean coast of Mexico continues to flourish.



# UK weather: 'Beast from the East Two' to bring snow, ice and floods

Published 3 hours ago



TYKE/BBC WEATHER WATCHERS

Snowfall in Auchleven, Aberdeenshire, on Saturday

**People are being urged to check in on the elderly and vulnerable as cold and snowy weather threatens disruption.**

An amber snow warning - meaning travel issues and power cuts are likely - has been issued for the east and south-east of England early on Sunday.

Snow and ice warnings were also in place for much of England, Scotland and **eastern Wales** from Saturday.

Met Office weather expert Steven Keates said there would be "many similarities" with **the Beast from the East in 2018**.

It is due to a combination of cold air from Scandinavia and Russia plus **Storm Darcy** bringing winds and snow, he said.

Asked whether he thought it was fair to call it the Beast from the East Two, the meteorologist said: "I think so. The air mass is not quite as cold as it was then, so it's not quite as extreme, but nonetheless this is probably the coldest weather we'll see across the UK as a whole since then.

"And if you're stepping outside at all through the next few days, it really is going to feel cold. Temperatures [will be] barely above freezing on a thermometer, and when you factor in a strong easterly wind, you'll be feeling many degrees below freezing."



PA MEDIA

image captionPeople enjoy a chilly walk along the Basingstoke Canal in Hampshire

Parts of Scotland have already seen heavy snowfall in the past few days, with up to 50cm in some places - but Scotland's amber warning for snow has now expired.

BBC Scotland Weather said further snow showers were expected across central, southern and eastern Scotland overnight into Sunday, which could bring up to 5cm more snow at low levels and up to 20cm on higher ground - where drifting is likely due to the strong winds.



**One amber warning is now in place** for London, the south-east and the east of England, which runs from 04:00 GMT on Sunday until 09:00 on Monday.

Those areas could see between five and 10cm of snow on Sunday - with up to 20cm in some places, the BBC Weather Centre said.

Yellow warnings - which mean there could be travel disruption and a slight chance of power cuts or communities being cut off - are also in place for:

- Snow and ice in the East and West Midlands, London and the South East, North West, South West and **Wales** from 21:00 on Saturday until 10:00 on Sunday
- Snow in the East of England and London and the South East from 23:00 on Saturday until 06:00 on Monday
- Snow and ice along the entire eastern length of Britain until Wednesday.



OOTATOON/BBC WEATHER WATCHERS

image captionParts of Scotland, including Ballater in Aberdeenshire, have seen persistent heavy snowfall and blizzards

Met Office forecasters have warned of "significant disruptive snowfall" and gale force winds in the south-east of England, saying up to 30cm of snow is possible in the Downs of Kent and the North Downs.

Meteorologist Sarah Kent said: "It is a small chance but the threat is there, up to a foot of snow potentially combined with extremely strong easterly winds. Even inland in that area, gusting could be 45mph and higher than that on the coasts.

"This could lead to significant drifting of any lying snow and obviously blizzards for the snow coming past you for anyone who is attempting to travel.

"Sadly there will be people who have to make journeys for the emergency services and there are still lorries that have to go to the ports. It is going to be really disruptive.

"With that sort of snowfall, you would expect some roads to be closed or blocked by the drifting snow, and long delays or some cancellations of public transport."

Public Health England's Dr Owen Landeg said it was "crucial" people looked out for those who may be vulnerable during the cold snap.

He called on the public to make sure those at-risk have enough food and drink to stay warm and well.

The conditions are caused by cold air spreading east from the Arctic Circle, tracking across the relatively mild North Sea to form showers that bring snow and a significant wind chill.

Storm Darcy, which was named by the Netherlands, is bringing an area of low pressure, adding moisture to the cold air to help form the snow.

### Vaccine effort

In Scotland, parts of which have seen heavy snow and ice since the end of last year, road clearing will be prioritised around Covid vaccination centres, Deputy First Minister John Swinney said.



He said it was possible weather conditions would create challenges for the vaccination programme over the next couple of days.



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image caption Drivers in the Highlands reported being stuck after heavy snow drifted

On Friday, about 20 vehicles **were stranded in snow at Loch Droma**, north west of Inverness, and emergency services have been assisting a rescue operation, Highland Council said.

The vehicles became stranded in two-metre snow drifts, said road management organisation Bear Scotland.

Network Rail said services have been disrupted on the Highland Mainline despite plough trains being used to clear snow.

Aside from icy conditions, there were 41 **flood warnings in place as of Saturday lunchtime** across parts of England, along the River Severn and the River Thames, according to the Environment Agency.

In Berkshire, parts of Cookham were left submerged after heavy rain caused flooding at Widbrook Common.



PA MEDIA

image caption Flood alerts are in place across England, with roads almost impassable in Mountsorrel, Leicestershire

Drivers, meanwhile, are advised to make sure their vehicle is ready for the cold weather amid predictions of an increase in breakdowns.

RAC spokesman Ben Aldous said: "This means checking oil, coolant and screen wash levels, as well as ensuring the tyres have plenty of tread and are inflated properly.

"Large amounts of snow on vehicles should be cleared before setting off to avoid it falling on to other road users. And never attempt to use the windscreen wipers to clear an icy or snowy windscreen - you risk damaging not only the wipers but the linkages too, which could be a more costly repair."

07 FEBRUARY 2021, SUNDAY



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
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