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DENR WANTS BETTER LIVES FOR WASTE PICKERS

By Maricel V. Cruz

DEPARTMENT of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Secretary Antonia Loyzaga wants to empower waste pickers by improving their livelihood and ensuring their full integration into an evolving solid waste management sector.

Loyzaga cited the need to enhance the status and work conditions of the informal waste sector and to invest in capacity building to transform their vulnerability.

"This sector is still locked out of the value chain of solid waste management, but they are in fact, critical and essential as part of the supply chain," Loyzaga said, speaking at the World Wildlife Fund for Nature-Philippines (WWF) media event in Quezon City.

"Through the EPR (extended producer responsibility) and the circular economy, there is an opportunity for us in government and for you all to promote social inclusion," she added.

The informal waste sector in the Philippines includes waste pickers in dumpsites and communal waste collection points.



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DENR, US-Asean council discuss partnership

THE Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), led by Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga, and delegates from the United States-Asean Business Council (US-ABC) discussed how both organizations can work together in the fields of climate adaptation, disaster risk reduction and plastic pollution.

"Climate change adaptation is very important to us, and any contributions by way of nature-based solutions for adaptation and for disaster risk reduction are what we'd like to build our relationship with you on," Yulo-Loyzaga told the US-ABC delegation during their meeting in Taguig City on July 12.

She said that the DENR is looking at investment in prevention from the private sector, particularly nature-based solutions such as forest conservation, control of river

erosion, water conservation efforts, and investment in gray and green infrastructure.

"We realize that the goal of the private sector has been primarily in providing relief during disasters, which we understand is valuable but is essentially an ex-post value to the country and to the communities," said Yulo-Loyzaga.

The official also encouraged the private sector to look beyond compliance to environmental, social and governance in terms of emissions reduction, renewable energy, energy efficiency and pollution management, and reminded them to help "clean up whatever it is you produced and released."

"What we want to do is to look for ways to produce materials which are sustainable, which are biodegradable, which are affordable but have the same functionality

as the packaging materials that we now are using because they are optimal in terms of our products that we produce," Yulo-Loyzaga said.

She also hoped for the US-ABC to help the DENR uplift the informal waste sector consisting of waste pickers in dumpsites and communal waste collection points.

"The sector is particularly impacted by hazardous environments because of the waste that we generate and their involvement in the solid waste management industry," the official said.

Moreover, Yulo-Loyzaga expressed optimism that the US-ABC can also be an advocate for adaptation and not just mitigation. "We hope that we can share that advocacy, and we look for ways to actually innovate," she added.

JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL



Take that, illegal loggers: 'Delikado' in the running for Emmy Award

The acclaimed film about Palawan's forest defenders is nominated

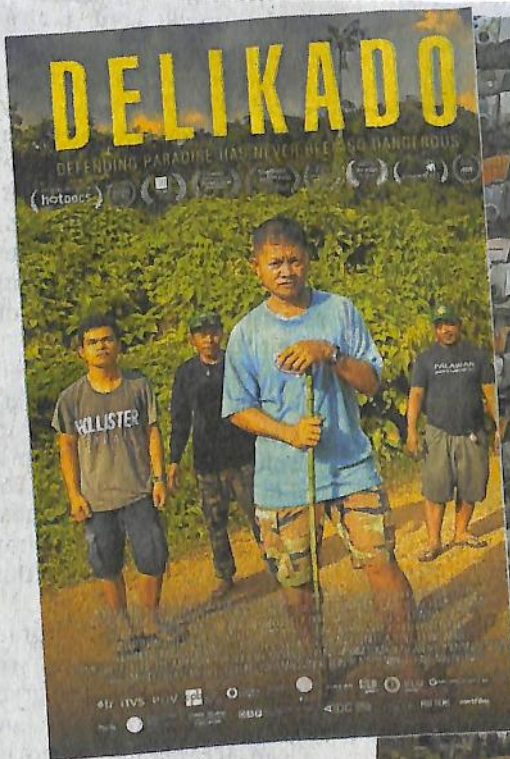
By **Alya B. Honasan**
@Inq_Lifestyle

Delikado," the provocative documentary film about the rape of the forests in Palawan, the Philippines' "Last Frontier" and bastion of environmentalism, the villains carrying out this violation and most important, the defenders fighting a dangerous battle, has received recognition anew.

It was announced as a nominee for Outstanding Investigative Documentary at the 44th News and Doc Emmy Awards, with the Documentary Awards set for Sept. 28 in Los Angeles, California. The awards are given annually for outstanding work in the American and international television industry.

"Delikado" is nominated as a Public Broadcasting System (PBS) series, one of five documentaries cited, including HBO Max's "Escape from Kabul," Netflix's "FIFA Uncovered" and "I Am Vanessa Guillen," and Amazon Prime's "Flight/Risk."

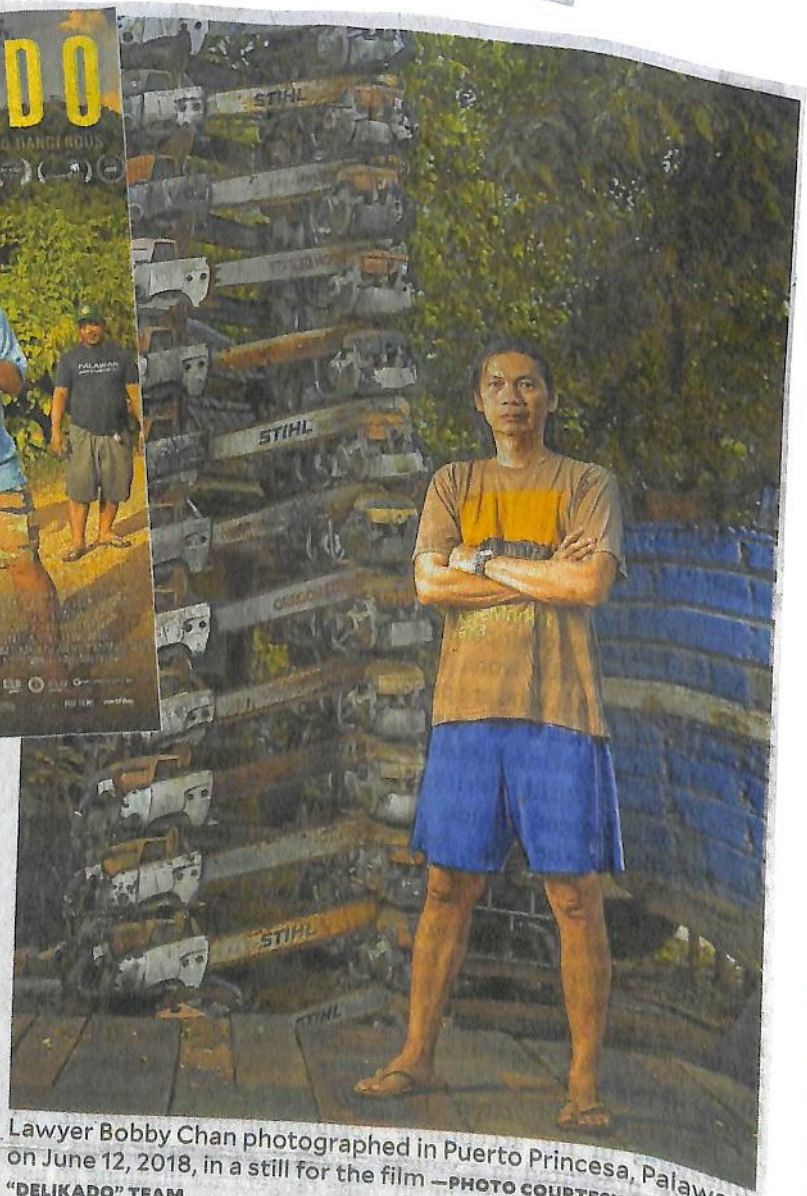
"Delikado," as reported by Lifestyle last Aug. 6, 2022, is directed by Karl Malakunas, produced by Michael Collins, Kara Magsanoc-Alikpala, Malakunas and Marty Syjuco, written by Collins, Malakunas and Laura Nix, and features haunting original music by Nainita Desai. It took several years to make.



The poster for the acclaimed documentary

and has been screened in film festivals worldwide, to much acclaim.

"Delikado" won the Sustainable Futures Award at the 69th Sydney Film Festival in June 2022, and received a nomination for the Asia Pacific Screen Award. At the Melbourne Film Festival, where it was also screened in August, it was de-



Lawyer Bobby Chan photographed in Puerto Princesa, Palawan, on June 12, 2018, in a still for the film —PHOTO COURTESY OF "DELIKADO" TEAM



scribed in a festival statement as a “thrilleresque documentary [that] cuts like a chainsaw at the heart of the Philippines’ fight for its environmental life.”

Packed house

In the Philippines, the two-and-a-half-hour-long film was screened as the closing entry of the Cinemalaya Festival on Aug. 13, 2022, to a packed, applauding house at the Main Theater of the Cultural Center of the Philippines. The special screening of the film featured its main protagonists as special guests, who joined a question-and-answer forum afterwards: lawyer Bobby Chan of the Palawan NGO Network Inc. (PNNI), PNNI para-enforcer Tata Balladares, and former El Nido mayor and environmentalist Nieves Rosento. Also present was the family of para-enforcer Ruben “Kap” Arzaga, who was shot dead during the actual filming, most likely upon orders of illegal loggers whose territories the para-enforcers were encroaching on.

“Delikado” is Filipino for “fragile” or “dangerous,” which easily applies to the situation of the para-enforcers, who would confiscate chainsaws wielded by men working for powerful politicians. It was aired for international audiences by PBS,

an American public broadcaster of documentaries and series, on its Emmy Award-winning documentary series “POV.”

The documentary shone with the informed, outstanding directing of Malakunas, an award-winning journalist with Agence France-Presse in Hong Kong, but who also served as Manila bureau chief for the news service for eight years.

In a statement before the Manila Cinemalaya screening, Malakunas recounted how he was preparing to head to Palawan for an article on ecotourism, when his contact, an environmental crusader, was shot and killed. “I went anyway, to investigate his murder. When I was there, I discovered this seemingly idyllic island was being destroyed by the people in power who were meant to be protecting it. I also discovered a small group of people putting their lives on the line trying to stop the destruction.”

Manila-based producer Magsanoc-Alikpala says she was “stunned” at the recognition. “I jumped for joy. I also hope this news will bring new energy to the issue of illegal logging, and galvanize more support for all environmental defenders in Palawan who risk their lives and the future of their families to protect our last frontier.” **INO**



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Ipo Dam passes normal water level; 3 others up

BY CLAIRE BERNADETTE MONDARES

IPO Dam water level has reached the 101.06-meter mark, slightly exceeding the reservoir's normal high of 101.00 meters, the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (Pagasa) said Saturday.

The water reservoir is one of the three dams situated in

Bulacan province, where several low-lying areas are flooded due to Typhoon "Egay's" continuous

heavy rains.

In its 6 a.m. bulletin, Pagasa said the La Mesa Dam in Quezon City was near the spilling level of 80.15 meters, with its present water level at 79.58 meters.

Two other major reservoirs in the Province of Benguet — the Ambuklao and Binga Dams — also have water levels nearing their normal highs.

The present water level of Am-

buklao Dam is 751.58 meters, with its normal high at 752 meters.

Meanwhile, Binga Dam's water level is at 574.58 meters, nearly hitting its normal high of 575 meters.

On the other hand, the Angat Dam, which is also located in Bulacan, increased its water level by 3.5 meters from 188.20 meters on Friday to 191.70 meters on Saturday, while its normal high level is at 210 meters, Pagasa said.



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No climate crisis agreement at G20 environment meeting

CHENNAI, India (AFP) — Environment ministers from G20 nations failed to agree on peaking global emissions by 2025 and other crucial issues to address the global climate crisis at their meeting in India on Friday.

No breakthrough was possible on several key points ahead of this year's COP28 climate talks, with negotiations also failing to reach a consensus on tripling renewable energy use.

"I am very disappointed," France's ecological transition minister Christophe Bechu told AFP after the meeting.

"We are not able to reach an agreement of increasing drastically renewable energies, we are not able to reach an agreement on phasing out or down fossil fuels, especially coal," he said.

"Records of temperatures, catastrophes, giant fires, and we are not able to reach an agreement on the peaking (of) emissions by 2025."

The discussions with China, Saudi Arabia, and on climate issues with Russia had been "complicated," he added.

India's climate change minister Bhupender Yadav, who chaired the meeting, admitted there had been "some issues about energy, and some target-oriented issues".

The Chennai meeting comes days after energy ministers from the bloc—which represents more than 80 percent of global GDP and CO2 emissions—failed to agree in Goa on a roadmap to cut fossil fuels from the global energy mix.

That was seen as a blow to mitigation efforts even as climate experts blame

record global temperatures for triggering floods, storms and heatwaves.

Major oil producers fear the impact of drastic mitigation on their economies, and Russia and Saudi Arabia were blamed for the lack of progress in Goa.

Campaigners were dismayed by the repeated failure to reach a deal Friday.

"Europe and North Africa are burning, Asia is ravaged with floods yet G20 climate ministers have failed to agree on a shared direction to halt the climate crisis which is escalating day by day," said Alex Scott of climate change think-tank E3G.

Reports of Saudi and Chinese resistance, he added, "fly in the face of their claims of defending the interests of developing countries."

'Self-interest'

All present at Friday's conference

understood "the severity of the crisis" facing the world, Adnan Amin, chief executive of this year's COP28 climate talks, told AFP.

"But I think there's a kind of political understanding that still needs to be achieved," he said.

"It's very clear that every country in the world will start by looking at its immediate self-interest," he added.

Most delegations were led by their environment and climate change ministers, while the US delegation was headed by Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry.

Also at the talks was Emirati oil boss Sultan Al Jaber, who will lead the upcoming COP28 talks in the United Arab Emirates starting in late November.

He has been heavily criticized for his apparent conflict of interest as

head of the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company because burning fossil fuels is the main driver of global warming.

Livelihoods destroyed

With raging wildfires in Greece and a heatwave in Italy, European Union environment commissioner Virginijus Sinkevicius said ahead of the gathering that there was "growing evidence on the ground of devastating climate impact" and "the livelihoods of people are being destroyed."

But progress in global negotiations has been slow, with the G20 polarized by Russia's war in Ukraine and sharp divisions on key issues.

Questions on financing the transition and ameliorating its short-term impacts have long been a point of contention between developing and wealthy nations.

Major developing countries such as India argue that legacy emitters need to spend more to underwrite global mitigation efforts in poorer nations.

"Whatever was pledged by the developed countries must be fulfilled," Yadav said after the meeting, which he added had reached consensus on other issues including land degradation and sustainable use of ocean resources.



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4 factors driving this year's extreme heat, climate disasters

BETWEEN the record-breaking global heat and extreme downpours, it's hard to ignore that something unusual is going on with the weather in 2023. People have been quick to blame climate change—and they're right, to a point:

Human-caused global warming does play the biggest role. A recent study determined that the weekslong heat wave in Texas and Mexico that started in June 2023 would have been virtually impossible without it.

However, the extremes this year are sharper than anthropogenic global warming alone would be expected to cause.

Human activities that release greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere have been increasing temperatures gradually, at an average of 0.2 degrees Fahrenheit (°F) or 0.1 degrees Celsius (°C) per decade.

Three additional natural factors are also helping drive up global temperatures and fuel disasters this year: El Niño, solar fluctuations and a massive underwater volcanic eruption.

Unfortunately, these factors are combining in a way that is exacerbating global warming.

Still worse, we can expect unusually high temperatures to continue through at least 2025, which means even more extreme weather in the near future.

How El Niño is involved

EL NIÑO is a climate phenomenon that occurs every few years when surface water in the tropical Pacific reverses direction and heats up.

That warms the atmosphere above, which influences temperatures and weather patterns around the globe.

Essentially, the atmosphere borrows heat out of the Pacific, and global temperatures increase slightly.

This happened in 2016, the time of the last strong El Niño. Global temperatures increased by about 0.25 F (0.14 C) on average, making 2016 the warmest year on record.

A weak El Niño also occurred in 2019-2020, contributing to 2020 becoming the world's second-warmest year.

El Niño's opposite, La Niña, involves cooler-than-usual Pacific currents flowing westward, absorbing heat out of the atmosphere, which cools the globe.

The world just came out of three straight years of La Niña, meaning we're experiencing an even greater temperature swing.



Children play with water at a fountain during a heat wave at Stavros Niarchos foundation Cultural Center in Athens on July 21. A new study finds these intense and deadly hot spells gripping much of the globe in the American Southwest and Southern Europe could not have occurred without climate change. AP/PETROS GIANNAKOPOULOS

Based on increasing Pacific sea surface temperatures in mid-2023, climate modeling now suggests a 90 percent chance that Earth is headed toward its first strong El Niño since 2016.

Combined with the steady human-induced warming, Earth may soon again be breaking its annual temperature records.

June 2023 was the hottest in modern record. July saw global records for the hottest days and a large number of regional records, including an incomprehensible heat index of 152°F (67°C) in Iran.

Solar fluctuations

THE Sun may seem to shine at a constant rate, but it is a seething, churning ball of plasma whose radiating energy changes over many different time scales.

The Sun is slowly heating up and in half a billion years will boil away Earth's oceans.

On human time scales, however, the Sun's energy output varies only slightly, about 1 part in 1,000, over a repeating 11-year cycle.

The peaks of this cycle are too small for us to notice at a daily level, but they affect Earth's climate systems.

Rapid convection within our Sun both generates a strong magnetic field aligned with its spin axis and causes this field to fully flip and reverse every 11 years.

This is what causes the 11-year cycle in emitted solar radiation.

Earth's temperature increase during a solar maximum, compared with average solar output, is only about 0.09°F (0.05°C), roughly a third of a large El Niño.

The opposite happens during a solar minimum. However, unlike the variable and

unpredictable El Niño changes, the 11-year solar cycle is comparatively regular, consistent and predictable.

The last solar cycle hits minimum in 2020, reducing the effect of the modest 2020 El Niño.

The current solar cycle has already surpassed the peak of the relatively weak previous cycle (which was in 2014) and will peak in 2025, with the Sun's energy output increasing until then.

Massive volcanic eruption

VOLCANIC eruptions can also significantly affect global climates. They usually do this by lowering global temperatures when erupted sulfate aerosols shield and block a portion of incoming sunlight—but not always.

In an unusual twist, the largest volcanic eruption of the 21st century so far, the 2022 eruption of Tonga's Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha'apai is having a warming and not cooling effect.

The eruption released an unusually small amount of cooling sulfate aerosols but an enormous amount of water vapor. The molten magma exploded underwater, vaporizing a huge volume of ocean water that erupted like a geyser high into the atmosphere.

Water vapor is a powerful greenhouse gas, and the eruption may end up warming Earth's surface by about 0.06°F (0.035 °C), according to one estimate.

Unlike the cooling sulfate aerosols, which are actually tiny droplets of sulfuric acid that fall out of the atmosphere within one to two years, water vapor is a gas that can stay in the atmosphere for many years.

The warming impact of the Tonga volcano is expected to last for at least five years.

Underlying it all: Global warming

ALL of this comes on top of anthropogenic, or human-caused, global warming.

Humans have raised global average temperatures by about 1.1 °C since 1900 by releasing large volumes of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere.

For example, humans have increased the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere by 50 percent, primarily through combustion of fossil fuels in vehicles and power plants.

The warming from greenhouse gases is actually greater than 1.1°C, but it has been masked by other human factors that have a cooling effect, such as air pollution.

If human impacts were the only factors, each successive year would set a new record as the hottest year ever, but that doesn't happen. The year 2016 was the warmest so far, in large part because of the last large El Niño.

What does this mean for the future?

THE next couple of years could be very rough.

If a strong El Niño develops over the next year, combined with the solar maximum and the effects of the Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha'apai eruption, Earth's temperatures would likely soar to uncharted highs.

According to climate modeling, this would likely mean even more heat waves, forest fires, flash floods and other extreme weather events.

Both weather and climate forecasts have become very reliable in recent years, benefiting from vast amounts of data from Earth-orbiting satellites and enormous supercomputing power for forecasting the flow and interactions of heat and water among the complex components of the ocean, land and atmosphere.

Unfortunately, climate modeling shows that as temperatures continue to increase, weather events get more extreme.

There is now a greater than 50 percent chance that Earth's global temperature will reach 1.5°C by the year 2028, at least temporarily, increasing the risk of triggering climate tipping points with even greater human impacts.

Because of the unfortunate timing of several parts of the climate system, it seems that the odds are not in our favor. *Michael Wysession, Washington University in St. Louis/The Conversation (CC) via AP*



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Corals starting to bleach as global ocean temperatures hit record highs

THE water off South Florida is 32 degrees Celsius (32°C) in mid-July, and scientists are already seeing signs of coral bleaching off Central and South America.

Particularly concerning is how early in the summer we are seeing these high ocean temperatures. If the extreme heat persists, it could have dire consequences for coral reefs.

Just like humans, corals can handle some degree of stress, but the longer it lasts, the more harm it can do.

Corals can't move to cooler areas when water temperatures rise to dangerous levels. They are stuck in it. For those that are particularly sensitive to temperature stress, that can be devastating.

I lead the Coral Program at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Atlantic Oceanographic and Meteorological Lab in Miami, Florida. Healthy coral reef ecosystems are important for humans in numerous ways. Unfortunately, marine heat waves are becoming more common and more extreme, with potentially devastating consequences for reefs around the world that are already in a fragile state.

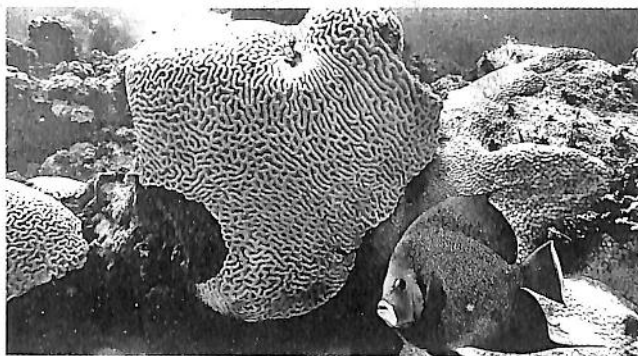
Why coral reefs matter to everyone

CORAL reefs are hot spots of biodiversity. They are often referred to as the rainforests of the sea because they are home to the highest concentrations of species in the ocean.

Healthy reefs are vibrant ecosystems that support fish and fisheries, which in turn support economies and food for millions of people.

Additionally, they provide billions of dollars in economic activity every year through tourism, particularly in places like the Florida Keys, where people go to scuba dive, snorkel, fish and experience the natural beauty of coral reefs.

If that isn't enough, reefs also protect shorelines, beaches and billions of dollars in coastal infrastructure by buffering wave energy, particularly during storms



IN this NOAA image, a fish swims near corals showing signs of bleaching at Cheeca Rocks off the coast of Islamorada, Florida, on July 23. Scientists have seen devastating effects from prolonged hot water surrounding Florida—coral bleaching and some death. ANDREW IBARRA/NOAA VIA AP

and hurricanes.

But corals are quite sensitive to warming water. They host a microscopic symbiotic algae called zooxanthella that photosynthesizes just like plants, providing food to the coral.

When the surrounding waters get too warm for too long, the zooxanthellae leave the coral, and the coral can turn pale or white—a process known as bleaching.

If corals stay bleached, they can become energetically compromised and ultimately die.

When corals die or their growth slows, these beautiful, complex reef habitats start disappearing and can eventually erode to sand.

A recent paper by John Morris, a scientist in my lab in Florida, shows that around 70 percent of reefs are now net erosional in the Florida Keys—meaning they are losing more habitat than they build.

Unfortunately, these critical coral reef habitats are in decline around the world because of extreme bleaching events, disease and numerous other human-caused stressors.

In the Florida Keys, coral cover has declined by about 90 percent over the past several decades.

Coral bleaching in 2023

IN the Port of Miami, where we have found particularly resilient coral communities, doctoral candidate Allyson DeMerlis documented the first

coral bleaching of her experimentally outplanted corals on July 11.

Other scientists we work with have reported coral bleaching off of Colombia, El Salvador, Costa Rica and Mexico in the eastern Pacific, as well as along the Caribbean coasts of Panama, Mexico and Belize.

We have yet to see widespread coral death associated with this particular marine heat wave, so it is possible the corals could recover if sea surface temperatures cool down soon.

However, global sea surface temperatures are at record highs, and large parts of the Atlantic and eastern Pacific are under bleaching alerts.

At this point, the evidence points to the potential for a very negative outcome.

El Niño is contributing to the problem this year, but the longer-term trends of rising ocean heat are driven by global warming fueled by human activities.

To put that into context, a paper by NOAA scientist Derek Manzello showed that in the Florida Keys, the number of days per year in which water temperatures were higher than 32 C had increased by more than 2,500 percent in the two decades following the mid-1990s relative to the prior 20 years.

That is a remarkable increase in the number of days that corals are

experiencing particularly stressful warm water.

What can we do to protect corals?

FIRST, we cannot give up on corals. Alice Webb, a coral reef scientist working with our group, recently published a study based on years of our research in the Florida Keys.

She modeled reef habitat persistence under climate, restoration and adaptation scenarios and found that protecting reefs is going to take everything—active restoration of reefs, helping corals acclimate or adapt to changing temperatures and, importantly, human curbing of greenhouse gas emissions.

Major restoration efforts are underway in the Florida Keys as part of the NOAA-led Mission Iconic Reefs.

We are also assessing how different coral individuals perform under stress, hoping to identify those that are particularly stress-tolerant by combing through the massive amounts of data from restoration projects and coral nurseries.

We are also evaluating stress-hardening techniques. For example, in tide pools, corals are exposed to large swings in temperature over short periods, making them more resilient to subsequent thermal stress events.

We are exploring whether it's possible to replicate that natural process in the lab, before corals are planted onto reefs, to better prepare them for stressful summers in the wild.

Coral bleaching on a large scale has really been documented only since the early 1980s. When I talk to people who have been fishing and diving in the Florida Keys since before I was born, they have amazing stories of how vibrant the reefs used to be. They know firsthand how bad things have become because they have lived it.

There isn't currently a single silver-bullet solution, but ignoring the harm being done is not an option. There is simply too much at stake. *Ian Enochs, NOAA/The Conversation (C) via AP*



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Tubbataha marine park rangers win int'l award

The award was given by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature-World Commission on Protected Areas 'for dedicated service and commitment'

By **Alya B. Honasan**
@Inq_Lifestyle

The men guarding the country's premiere marine protected area and natural park are getting the recognition they deserve.

Last July 26, in an online award ceremony broadcasted around the world, the Tubbataha Reefs National Park (TRNP) marine park rangers were given the International Union for the Conservation of Nature-World Commission on Protected Areas (IUCN-WCPA) International Ranger Awards.

The awards have been given annually since 2020 by the IUCN-WCPA in collaboration with the International Ranger Federation, Rewild, Conservation Allies, Universal Ranger Support Alliance (Ursa), IUCN US and WWF Tigers Alive Initiative, and are meant to "highlight ... the extraordinary work that rangers do in protected and conserved areas worldwide," the IUCN-WCPA website states. The awards also hope to improve ranger capabilities, raise awareness about their crucial work in conservation and share their unique stories.

The four rangers of the Tubbataha Management Office (TMO)—Segundo Conales Jr., Noel Bundal, Jeffrey David and Cresencio Caranay Jr.—were awarded "for dedicated service and commitment as marine rangers."

"Based on a remote island in Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park, the ranger team, all local community members, lives in isolation for extended periods, far from their families and from support," read Ursa program manager Olga Biergus, who presented the online award. "They have persevered in the face of COVID-19, personal problems, typhoons, injuries, sickness and threats. Alongside marine research and monitoring, and assisting and educating visitors, the team works tirelessly to intercept illegal fishers and voluntarily assists in the education



Rangers Jeffrey David and Noel Bundal in Tubbataha with their patrol boat



Rangers Cresencio Caranay Jr. and Segundo Conales Jr. at the TMO office in Puerto Princesa

and rehabilitation of offenders. As a result of their work, initially resistant local communities have now been inspired to support the park."

24/7

The rangers guard and patrol the park 24/7, and their work under protected area superintendent Angelique Songco has resulted in a dramatic reduction in illegal activities, preserving Tubbataha's unique biodiversity.

The award comes with a

\$10,000 cash prize to support the rangers' conservation work. The rangers of the TMO, who are permanently designated to guard the Philippine marine treasure and Unesco World Heritage Site from a ranger station in the middle of the Sulu Sea, where the 970-square-kilometer park is located, lead a composite team that includes rotating members from the Philippine Navy, the Philippine Coast Guard and the municipality of Cagayancillo, home of the park.

Ranger David cited his colleagues in his acceptance remarks, presented in a video during the awards. "I am so proud because even if we are isolated for most of the year in the middle of the Sulu Sea, we are not unseen and unappreciated; the international community recognizes our contributions to nature conservation," he said in Filipino.

The Tubbataha Rangers join other winners of the 2023 IUCN-WCPA International Ranger Awards from all over

the world, including three other teams: the 10 members of the Biological Corridor 3 Ranger Team, Bhutan; the five members of the Royal Belum State Park "Menraq" Team, Malaysia; and the nine-member Desniansko-Starohutskiy National Nature Park Ranger Team, Ukraine.

"Masaya po! (I'm happy)," declared Conales about the award; he has served as a ranger for 24 years. "Because they appreciate what we are doing in the TRNP, this will be a step [toward] getting Tubbataha recognized all over the world," he added in Filipino. Conales says the rangers are planning to use their prize money to buy solar panels and a refrigerator for their station, where they rotate for two-month shifts.

Supporters of Tubbataha are planning fundraising efforts to help complete the new ranger station, currently being constructed to replace the dilapidated 23-year-old former station, so the rangers can be safe in a new home. **INQ**



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Precious water, and SM Supermalls being part of the solution

Because of its scarcity, safe water is one of the world's most precious commodities today. Climate change and global warming are just some of the factors that have brought about this shortage, one that is acutely felt as water use continues to increase globally. This year, the Philippines is already feeling this scarcity – and it's easy to forget the lessons of 2019, when we did experience a water shortage, and water conservation was an important facet of getting through the summer months that year.

As part of every community where their malls stand, SM Supermalls is cognizant of the important role it can play in advocating water conservation, championing water recycling, and being part of the solution. It's something that SM Supermalls, with sustainability at the core of its operations, has prioritized for years now.

"We all know that fresh water is a finite resource, so it is important that we try our best to conserve it. This is why SM has been adhering to a circular framework when it comes to our resource consumption, including the way we use water in our malls," says Engr. Liza B. Silerio, vice president for SM Supermalls Corporate Compliance Group and SM Cares program director for Environment.

To promote this circularity and improve water efficiency, several SM Malls will have facilities that reduce its consumption of fresh water. Among these are the rainwater catchment basins that are found in 21 SM malls, and the sewage treatment plants. These allow water to be reused and/or recycled, ensuring there is enough water for the malls, and for the nearby communities.

To help better appreciate what is going on at SM Supermalls, and how they annually prepare for the El Niño months, SM Supermalls President and CEO Steven Tan, explained: "For decades, we have been recycling our water for majority of the uses in our malls, four million cubic meters a year – or to give a sense of scale, about 1,600

Olympic-sized pools each year. We use this recycled water for cooling our aircons, for cleaning and watering our plants, for cleaning external areas of our malls and our parking structures, and this extends to all our tenants. We harvest the water they use, and have tech-



SM SUPERMALLS SVP for Marketing Jonjon San Agustin, SM Supermalls VP for Corporate Compliance Engr. Liza Silerio, and Baguio City Mayor Benjie Magalong visit the SM City Baguio water filtration system.

nologies in place to recycle this."

"We use waterless urinals, and we have STPs on all our malls as well as sensor-activated faucets.

This really has been a standard feature in all our malls because Mr. Hans Sy is a sustainability champion; and as an engineer, he has always reminded us to ensure we are prepared for eventual shortages such as these."

Through these basins and treatment facilities, SM Supermalls prove they are very conscious of their own use of water, and lessen the dependence on the LGU's water tables, so that there is more water for the community's use. The malls also constantly push via their public information drive, reminding mallgoers of the need to recycle and conserve. Leading by example is the best way to achieve this.

Just last month, SM City Baguio launched new technology that treats the collected rainwater, and converts this into potable water that the tenants and the mall can use

for cooking and for cleaning. It's estimated that the Baguio mall can save up to 51,000 cubic meters of water a year from this development – and to put this in layman's terms, it's equivalent to 20 swimming pools.

As Engr. Silerio emphasizes: "Aside from minimizing our impact on common water resources, recycling water through these sewage treatment plants allows our malls to save big on water costs. Now, imagine if we all did it. I think we can leave a significant positive impact on our country's source of fresh water."

SM Prime is committed to supporting the United Nations in achieving its Sustainable Development Goals, of which SDG #6 is Clean Water and Sanitation. Availability and the sustainable



**HEARD IT
THROUGH THE
GRIPE-VINE:
OUR NEW
ABNORMAL**
PHILIP CU UNJIENG



THE WATER filtration system at SM City Baguio.

management of water and sanitation are two things every Filipino should be entitled to; and SM takes seriously the role it can play in providing that.

Finding multiple ways to be of service to the community is part of the SM DNA – in partnership with the Manila Observatory, SM provides energy, climate and weather data through 49 automated weather stations that are situated on top of SM malls across the country.