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# DENR

## IN THE NEWS

Strategic Communication and Initiative Service



## Sarangani Protected Seascape turns 24

**S**ARANGANI Bay, one of the country's richest body of water and home to the tuna industry, recently marked another milestone as it celebrated its 24th year as a protected seascape.

To mark the occasion, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources Region 12 in collaboration with the Protected Area Management Board launched the first-ever Sarangani Bay Protected Seascape (SBPS) Week to highlight the efforts to protect and conserve its coastal and marine resources.

The bay was declared a Protected Seascape by former president Fidel Ramos under Proclamation No. 756 in 1996, covering an area of 215,950 hectares.

Held in Gen. Santos City and various parts of Sarangani province, the weeklong observance consisted of mall exhibits of marine species and simultaneous bay-wide cleanups participated in by the 68 barangays, business and tourism establishments along the bay's coast.

A dive safari and underwater photography contest held at Maitum, Kiamba and Maasim towns showcased Sarangani's emerging scuba diving sites. Topping the 3-day photo tilt were Bretch Garcinez of General Santos City and East Pardillo of Davao City who won the wide and macro categories, respectively.

Fringe activities included a 3-day environmental forum and enforcement summit, trash to art, mass dance and



Coastal cleanup

logo making competitions, and the search for the Ambassador of SBPS.

Declared by the Department of Tourism as a scuba diving haven in southern Mindanao in 2017, the bay was also listed by the DENR as a Key Marine Biodiversity Areas with coral resources covering 2,293 hectares, 60 important live hard coral genera, 411 reef species, and 11 species of seagrass.

The DENR has also monitored various dolphin species, killer whales, dwarf and pygmy sperm whales in the bay, attesting to its rich biodiversity.

Because of the event's success, the SBPS Protected Area Management Board passed a resolution declaring March 5 as the annual SBPS Day, and directing local government

units, major stakeholders, and partner organizations to take part in the observance.

Sarangani governor and PAMB vice chair Steve Solon lauded the maiden celebration, saying it symbolizes a broader commitment in preserving the bay as a shelter, and source of living and life to the areas around it.

He said that the provincial government is a major stakeholder in the preservation of the bay's ecosystem through its Sulong Kalikasan program and the Environmental Conservation and Protection Center.

Hugging a coastal road of some 224 kilometers, the bay is host to the Gen. Santos City Fish Port Complex, fisherfolk villages, beach resorts, a coal energy power plant, shipyards, marine parks and sanctuaries, and aquaculture farms.

# Efforts to solve world plastics problem continue

**T**he coronavirus pandemic continues to circle the globe and nations are carrying various moves to cope with it, but it is good to know that many other problems are also being acted upon, such as the mountains of plastics wastes that have long been rising on the world's ocean beds.

\*-This last weekend, Nestle, Unilever, and other food and beverage companies signed the European Plastics Pact, a public-private coalition which seeks to accelerate the move towards a "circular economy" for plastic packaging.

All signatories to the pact commit themselves to design their plastic packages and single-use plastics to be reusable where possible and, in any case, recyclable by 2025. They commit to increase their collection and recycling capacity by at least 25 percent by 2025, and to increase their use of recycled plastics in new products and packaging by 30 percent.

The European Plastics Pact was organized in 2020 by the Dutch, French, and Danish governments to provide an opportunity for governments and businesses to work together for a greener future. "We have to start treating plastic as the valuable raw material it is and keep it out of our oceans," Dutch Minister for Environment Stientje van Veldhoven said at the time the pact was or-

ganized. "We need more recycling capacity and we need new product design."

In the Philippines, there are today over 30 bills filed in the House of Representatives to address the problem of plastic wastes accumulating in landfills and the seas around us. Most of the bills focus on banning single-use plastics - such as stirrers and straws offered by restaurants, plastic bags used by housewives in their marketing, and sachets for pills and other medicine as well as for shampoo and instant coffee. But rather than merely banning single-use plastics, there is a strong move for a law to encourage the collecting and recycling of plastic products into useful materials like blocks for road and pavement construction.

As one of the world's greatest users of plastic packaging, Nestle's joining the European Plastics Pact is a big step in the growing worldwide movement to end the mountains of plastic wastes in the world's oceans, threatening sea life and ultimately human life.

With such moves as Nestle and other producers of food, beauty products, and medicine, coupled with governments enacting the needed laws, and the world's consumers asserting themselves through their choices of products, the world plastics problem should soon be a thing of the past.

Roni SARDIAGA  
SKP  
MANILA BULLETIN  
MARCH 18, 2020

SOLUTION





## EDITORIAL

# Tuloy ang pagsisikap upang masolusyunan ang problema sa plastic

**P**ATULOY na umiikot sa mundo ang mapanganib na coronavirus pandemic at tuloy naman ang iba't ibang hakbang upang matugunan ito, ngunit nakatutuwa pa ring malaman na patuloy pa ring naaaksyunan ang iba pang problema, tulad ng bundok-bundok na basurang plastic na patuloy na natatambak sa mga karagatan ng mundo.

Nitong nakaraang weekend, lumagda ang Nestle, Unilever, at iba pang food and beverage companies sa European Plastics Pact, isang pagtutulungan ng pampubliko at pribadong sector upang palakasin ang habang tungo sa isang "circular economy" para sa plastic packaging.

Lahat ng lumagda sa kasunduan ay nangako ididisenyo ang kanilang mga ginagamit na plastic packages at single-use plastics upang maging reusable kung posible man, at maging recyclable pagsapit ng 2025. Nangako silang tataasan ang kanilang koleksyon at kakayahan sa pagre-recycle sa hanggang 25 porsiyento pagsapit ng 2025, at taasan ang kanilang paggamit ng recycled plastics para sa mga bagong proyekto at packaging ng hanggang 30 porsiyento.

Inorganisa ang European Plastics Pact ngayong 2020 ng Dutch, French, at Danish government upang bigyan ng pagkakataon at pamahalaan at mga negosyo na magtulungan para sa mas magandang kinabukasan. "We have to start treating plastic as the valuable raw material it is and keep it out of our oceans," pahayag ni Dutch Minister for Environment Stientje van Veldhoven sa pagtatatag ng kasunduan. "We need more recycling capacity and we need new product design."

Sa Pilipinas, may tinatayang higit 30 panukalang-batas na nakahain sa Kamara de Representantes upang matugunan ang problema ng basurang plastic na natatambak sa mga landfills at dagat sa paligid natin. Karamihan sa mga panukala ang nakatuon sa pagbabawal ng single-use plastics - tulad ng stirrers at straws na iniaalok ng mga kainan, mga plastic bags na ginagamit sa pamimili at mga pakete ng medisina at iba pang gamot, gayundin ang shampoo at instant coffee. Ngunit sa halip na ipagbawal lamang ang mga single-use plastics, may malaking hakbang din para sa isang batas na hihikayat na kolektahin at i-recycle ang mga produktong plastic para sa paggawa ng kapaki-pakinabang na produkto tulad sa paggawa ng kalsada at gamit sa konstruksiyon.

Bilang isa sa "world's greatest user" ng plastic packaging, ang pakikiisa ng Nestle sa European Plastics Pact ay isang malaking hakbang para sa lumalagong pandaigdigang hakbang upang wakasan at mahinto ang patuloy na pagdami ng plastic sa mga karagatan ng mundo, na nagbibigay ng panganib sa buhay ng mga laman-dagat at maging ng mga tao.

Sa hakbang na ito ng pakikiisa ng Nestle at iba pang gumagawa ng mga produktong pagkain, beauty products, at medisina, katuwang ang pamahalaan sa paggawa ng kinakailangang batas, at ang pagganap ng mga consumer sa kanilang pagpili ng produkto, hindi Malabo na maluliutas din ang problema sa plastic.



# EDITORIAL

## Efforts to solve world plastics problem continue

The coronavirus pandemic continues to circle the globe and nations are carrying various moves to cope with it, but it is good to know that many other problems are also being acted upon, such as the mountains of plastics wastes that have long been rising on the world's ocean beds.

This last weekend, Nestle, Unilever, and other food and beverage companies signed the European Plastics Pact, a public-private coalition which seeks to accelerate the move towards a "circular economy" for plastic packaging.

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The European Plastics Pact was organized in 2020 by the Dutch, French, and Danish governments to provide an opportunity for governments and businesses to work together for a greener future. "We have to start treating plastic as the valuable raw material it is and keep it out of our oceans," Dutch Minister for Environment Stien van Veldhoven said at the

time the pact was organized. "We need more recycling capacity and we need new product design."

In the Philippines, there are today over 30 bills filed in the House of Representatives to address the problem of plastic wastes accumulating in landfills and the seas around us. Most of the bills focus on banning single-use plastics – such as stirrers and straws offered by restaurants, plastic bags used by housewives in their marketing, and sachets for pills and other medicine as well as for shampoo and instant coffee. But rather than merely banning single-use plastics, there is a strong move for a law to encourage the collecting and recycling of plastic products into useful materials like blocks for road and pavement construction.

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# Editorial

## What's bad for mankind has been good for Earth

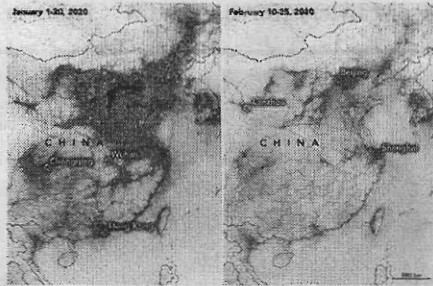
**T**HERE have been very few bright spots in the ongoing coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) pandemic, so when we find one, it deserves to be highlighted. Although the world economy is being destroyed before our very eyes, it appears that the profound decrease in normal human activity because of the rapid spread of the new coronavirus has been remarkably beneficial to Earth's overworked environment.

This first became apparent about two weeks ago when satellite imagery provided by the United States National Aeronautics and Space Administration showed an almost total absence of the normal air pollution in China.

The reduction was caused by the extensive shutdown of Chinese industries and transportation at the height of the

Covid-19 outbreak there, which left most people in major cities quarantined in their homes. Similar images taken of other areas under "lockdown," particularly Italy, in recent days show a similar absence of air pollution. Although the large-scale quarantine in Luzon has only been in effect for a couple of days, the evidence from elsewhere suggests we can expect a similar benefit here.

In fact, the reduction in pollution should be felt worldwide, now that the world's other biggest polluters — the US and Europe — are imposing tighter restrictions in an effort to slow the spread of Covid-19. Worldwide air travel has virtually come to a standstill, and as people are forced to observe community-wide quarantines, road traffic is quickly disappearing as well. The sharp downturn in industrial activity has led to a corresponding drop in electricity demand, reducing the emissions of power plants, the biggest source of harmful greenhouse gases. Maritime shipping traffic has also been sharply curtailed, reducing another major source of air and sea pollution.



There are a few conclusions we can draw from all this. First, the reduction of man's environmental impact, even for a short time and for an unexpected and frankly undesirable reason, buys the world a little time to develop more long-term solutions to reduce or mitigate the effects of climate change. The advantage gained is very small, and may be insignificant, but it is a positive gain nonetheless.

Second, the stark evidence that sharply reduced human activity has resulted in a corresponding immediate sharp reduction in detectable pollution and should be the final nail in the coffin of the irrational and stubborn "climate change denial" minority. Its arguments, based on belief and opinion, can no longer refute actual scientific research, when that research is backed by stark visual evidence that even the most uneducated viewer can understand.

Those are positive outcomes. The final conclusion, however, is somewhat discouraging. The evidence of a large reduction in pollution confirms what the most "radical" climate change activists have been telling the rest of us for years. In order to reduce harmful emissions and slow or stop global warming, and the multitude of destructive impacts it will bring, civilization as a whole will have to radically alter its activity and change its way of life. That change has been forced on all of us, at least temporarily, by the unexpected appearance and rapid spread of the new coronavirus. What we have learned is that it is extremely uncomfortable and disruptive. Furthermore, given the scale and speed of the economic collapse the world is experiencing as a result of it, we have also learned that we are nowhere near being able to live with it, to integrate climate change mitigation and adaptation into what we think of as a "normal" life.

It has been quite an object lesson, and one that we sincerely hope the world does not forget when the Covid-19 crisis has passed, as it eventually will. Let us not rekindle the climate change "debate," because there is no longer any debate. Human activity is responsible for climate change, and when human activity stops, so does the damage we do to the environment. The world needs to accept this at last, and work on real solutions instead of half-measures and entertaining the arguments of the half-informed.

# MWSS sees spike in MM water consumption

By MADELAINE B. MIRAFLOR

**T**he water consumption of Metro Manila and its nearby provinces is expected to spike during the community quarantine ordered by President Rodrigo Duterte as a measure to prevent the spread of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19).

But Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System's (MWSS) top official assured that although there will still be frequent water service interruptions due to depleting supply at the capital's reservoirs, there will be no repeat of last year's water woes, wherein some households had to endure daily water service interruption for 12 hours in the span of a week.

In an interview, MWSS Administrator Emmanuel Salamat said on Monday that "it is expected" that the water consumption in Metro Manila will soon spike, following the declaration of the state of public health emergency amid COVID-19 as well as Duterte's order to implement a 30-day community quarantine across the National Capital Region (NCR). This community quarantine order was expanded on Monday to cover the entire Luzon.

"We ask the public to stay calm and just store enough wa-

ter," Salamat said. "We will live day by day while we assess our current situation and implement measures to cope with the future requirements of Metro Manila and other service areas within MWSS jurisdiction including Cavite, Rizal, and Bulacan".

To recall, the Department of Health (DOH) said that one of the protective measures amid the spread of COVID-19 is the frequent and proper handwashing, which should last for at least 20 seconds.

Some companies were also forced to allow their employees to work from home amid the implementation of community quarantine in NCR, which also suspended classes at all levels until April 12.

Because of this, Jennifer Rufo, Maynilad's head for stakeholders communications office, said her company indeed "expects an increase in water consumption among residents at this time".

Jeric Sevilla, head of Manila Water's corporate communications, basically said the same thing. However, he pointed out that there could be an offset in the demand as commercial establishments like malls, offices, and schools also close down.

"We see a possible increase in demand for domestic or residential consumption because of the

community quarantine but we also expect a decline in demand or consumption of institutional and commercial establishments with the closure of malls, schools and work from home arrangements in government and private companies," Sevilla said.

Nevertheless, both Maynilad and Manila Water will still continue to implement water service interruption in some areas to prevent a widespread and serious shortage.

"Preventive maintenance activities and emergency repairs will still continue and may cause temporary service interruptions. [Manila Water] customers, however, will be advised accordingly," Sevilla said in a text message.

For her part, Rufo said there is still on-going service interruptions in some areas serviced by Maynilad, but it is already "gradually shortening" since the National Water Resources Board (NWRB) already increased the water allocation that MWSS gets from Angat Dam for its two concessionaires.

The 53-year old Angat Dam currently releases 4 million liters of water per day (mld). Of this, Maynilad gets an allocation of about 2,400 mld, while Manila Water gets the remaining 1,600 mld as well as all of the supply coming from La Mesa Dam.



NCR



BW/FILE

### **NWRB assures enough water supply in the capital**

THE NATIONAL Water Resources Board (NWRB) has guaranteed that water supply is sufficient in Metro Manila amid further decline in the water level of Angat Dam. As of Tuesday morning, Angat Dam's water level was at 199.73 meters, lower by 0.10 meters from Monday, according to data from the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical, and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA). Its "ideal" water level is at 212 meters.—

**Revin Mikhael D. Ochave**

## Protect government workers, too, from the coronavirus

*The New York Times* editorial

Stay home. Avoid crowds. Work remotely. Keep at least 6 feet between you and other people. As the coronavirus tightens its grip, the pleas from health experts for people to limit face-to-face contact are growing ever more pointed and urgent.

And yet, even as workplaces and schools are being shut down across America, the federal government has been slow to shift to an emergency footing with its sprawling workforce, breeding chaos and confusion — and endangering lives — in agencies and offices from coast to coast.

Despite having told workers weeks ago to prepare for a major shift to working remotely, few administration agencies have made more than minor adjustments, according to *The Washington Post*. Some offices, most notably those with employees who have tested positive for the virus, have sent workers home to telecommute. Others have instituted rotating schedules to limit crowding. Nonessential travel has been curtailed, and public tours canceled.

But unlike during other types of emergencies, there is little guidance about how agencies and departments should approach this pandemic. Only a small percentage of workers have been cleared to work from home, *The Post* noted, leaving a majority to continue crowding into cubicles and other work sites. Messaging from the top, specifically the Office of Management and Budget, has been at best muddled.

On Thursday evening, the budget office issued a memo urging agency and department heads to maximize telework

specifically for employees considered at increased health risk. Three days later, faced with growing complaints, the budget office issued updated guidance encouraging agencies in the Washington area — where only 15% of the federal civilian workforce is — to offer “maximum telework flexibilities” for all eligible workers.

Such vague, shifting, uneven direction is insufficient and unacceptable. The nation is in the midst of an emergency. Nonessential workers should be sent home. Those eligible to telework should be directed to do so. If this requires obtaining special permission for, say, call-center workers to answer phones from home, then such permission should be expedited.

Admittedly, a shift to telework of this magnitude would be an unprecedented challenge for the federal government. It is made even more difficult by the fact that the Trump administration has scaled back telework levels established during the Obama era. It is incumbent upon the White House to meet this challenge.

The situation on Capitol Hill is also unsettling. After being sent home last Thursday, senators are back in Washington this week to vote on a couple of key bills, including an emergency relief measure aimed at softening the economic devastation of the pandemic. Such relief is desperately needed, but what is not needed is for lawmakers to be zipping to and from their home states at a time when air travel is being discouraged in general.

*(To be continued)*