



Statement of Wetlands International Philippines

**Senate Hearing on Integrated Coastal Management and National Greenbelt Action Plan**

Sen J.P. Laurel Room 2/F Right Wing, Senate

05 March 2024

*Magandang tanghali sa inyong lahat!* Good noon to the Madam Senator Villar, representatives of the national government agencies, and colleagues in the academe and non-government organizations.

Wetlands International Philippines is grateful for this opportunity to share our views on the Integrated Coastal Management and National Greenbelt Action Plan. Wetlands International is a non-government organization whose mandate is to support governments that are signatories to the Convention on Wetlands or Ramsar Convention, such as the Philippines. Our mission is safeguarding and protecting wetlands for people and nature. Natural wetlands include rivers, lakes, swamps, mangrove forests, intertidal mudflats, seagrass beds, and shallow coral reefs.

We support the passage of an Integrated Coastal Management and National Greenbelt Action Plan. We further support the prioritization of the passage of the bill to provide enabling policy and fiscal conditions for NGOs to tackle environmental issues and concerns in the coastal zone.

We respectfully express a couple of views for consideration of the Committee on Environment and Climate Change. Rehabilitation and reforestation of mangrove areas are sufficient provisions (to establish greenbelts along coastlines). Afforestation, the planting of trees where there were no trees before, is not consistent with the principles of Ecological Mangrove Restoration and the Resolution in the Ramsar Convention for the conservation and sustainable use of intertidal mudflats. Afforestation can lead to bad practices, particularly the planting of mangrove saplings in the intertidal mudflat area, seagrass beds, and reef flat. This practice can have impact on the community along the coasts who are dependent on coastal resources for sustenance and livelihoods. Gleaning for fishes, shellfishes, sea urchins, and other edible organisms is observed during low tides throughout the Philippines (example in photo – Kauswagan, northern Mindanao). Gleaning areas are important especially during extreme events. It is the source of food and, as such, key for the resilience of the community during extreme events.

Mangrove rehabilitation takes at least five (5) years. The pilot project for the reversion of an abandoned, undeveloped, and underproductive fishpond in Barangay Nula-tula, Tacloban, Leyte to mangrove forest is a successful one. After two (2) years (2020), the trees grew to 2-3 meters high; and after five (5) years (2023), some trees grew to 6-8 meters. Rehabilitated fishponds to mangrove forests, however, can easily be cleared and lost by a change in governance. We suggest the establishment of a clear and strong protection of greenbelts.

In conclusion, we wish to express our continuous support for actions to finalize the ICM and NGAP and its future implementation for the protection of coastlines, adaptation to climate change, and support to coastal fisheries.

Wetlands International Philippines is the Convenor of the Global Mangrove Alliance Philippines Chapter. The core members are Conservation International Philippines, RARE Philippines, World Wide Fund for Nature Philippines, Wetlands International Philippines, and Zoological Society of London (ZSL)-Philippines. We are committed to assisting the government in halting loss, restoring half, and doubling protection of mangroves in the Philippines.

I would like to highlight that ZSL Philippines has submitted to the Secretariat of the Committee an example of an Action Plan for mangrove rehabilitation and the power point presentation notes on the rationale for mangrove rehabilitation.

*Maraming salamat po.*

Submitted by:

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