



OFFICIAL STATEMENT ON THE MANILA BAY “WHITE BEACH” PROJECT

We, the Green Party of the Philippines, is an emerging environmental party in the Philippines and at present has nationwide membership covering 16 regions, 31 provinces, and 163 cities and municipalities. We have active chapters at the "local" government administrative units, at city and municipal levels.

As a political movement we recognize that every piece of solution to an environmental problem is very important and this can be big or small. We also believe that in any environmental project sustainability is the key towards creating a viable solution to an existing problem.

BACKGROUND OF THE PROJECT

The “Manila Bay Rehabilitation” was launched on January 26, 2017, by DENR Secretary Roy Cimatu. It is a project which was the result of a Supreme Court decision dated December 18, 2008. The Supreme Court decision above was the result of a petition by a determined group of private individuals calling themselves the “Concerned Residents of Manila Bay”. The group included Atty. Jaime Agustin Oposa, who is the son of the legendary environmental activist Atty. Antonio Oposa, a Ramon Magsaysay awardee. (1)

On January 29, 1999, the Concerned Residents of Manila Bay filed a civil suit at the Regional Trial Court of Imus, Cavite, to force government agencies to clean up Manila Bay, as they were mandated to, by their own policy. In response, the government sued them, and lost; the process took almost 10 years. In 2008, the Supreme Court ruled that the government had to do it. It took another 10 years before the project was actually implemented.

Note, however that this nowhere in this order was it mentioned the specifics of the project especially one involving dolomite or white sanding the Manila Bay Area.

HEALTH CONCERNS ON THE PROJECT

The Department of Health (DOH) already cleared the issue on the health hazards of the project. According to a statement on September 9, 2020 DOH said it learned from the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) that the “white sand” it would be used to beautify Manila Bay is a type of dolomite that is two to five millimeters or 100 times bigger than dust. (2)

DOH also said that “occupational health and safety standards for workers and precautionary measures for the containment of possible dust formation” are likewise being enforced in the implementation of the multi-million-peso project, citing information it got from DENR.

“Therefore, in terms of the general safety of the public who will be enjoying the shoreline once permitted, DOH assures that no untoward incidents will occur as a result of this endeavor,” DOH added.

THE EFFECTS OF WHITE SAND ON MANILA BAY REHABILITATION

Although it can be considered that this is not the ultimate solution to the problem in Manila Bay, we believe that in part it can contribute to the beautification of the area and become an added deterrent in the throwing of waste in Manila Bay.

As long as, the DENR assures that the white sand made of dolomite will remain intact despite possible erosion due to strong currents especially during typhoon, then we believe that it is environmentally sound.

THE PROBLEM OF THE “WHITE SAND” MANILA BAY REHABILITATION

Despite, the foregoing possible positive impact of the “White Sand” Project in Manila Bay, we believe that the method of implementation of the project is problematic as follows:

1. **OVERPRICED:** The project reportedly costs 397 Million but according to Ridon, the project should cost no more than the total amount of PHP 56.977-Million for 62,100 cu. meters. (3)
2. **NOT PART OF NEDA PLAN:** The white sand dumping is not part of the NEDA Plan for Manila Bay and this was admitted by DENR. (4)
3. **ENVIRONMENTAL DESTRUCTION:** The source of the dolomite sand was Alcoy, Cebu and the area was one of the remaining forest reserves and the area was partly destroyed (5)
4. **CEBU LOCAL GOVERNMENT RESPONSE:** The Cebu local government was not informed about the supposed project, hence they issued a cease-and-desist order. (6)

OUR CALL AND RESOLUTION

As an emerging green party and movement, we believe that supporting the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) in this project is very important and should be the right course of action. However, we should not forget the fact that there are certain issues to be resolved in this particular project.

We hereby make the following stand and call:

1. Make an investigation into the process of implementing the project and file appropriate actions against anyone who commits an irregularity.
2. Investigate reports that the outsourced firm by DENR is not only using the dolomites they quarry for local use but is also exporting these products.
3. For the NEDA and the DENR to find a way to sort out the plan for the rehabilitation of Manila Bay, to avoid further misunderstanding. Also, to see to it that this current project will now form part of the overall plan.
4. To the DENR, to ensure that the white sand placed in the Manila Bay area will remain intact and that they would monitor and assure that there will be no adverse effect of this project to both plants, animals and humans in the area.

Sources:

- (1) Supreme Court Decision | https://lawphil.net/judjuris/juri2008/dec2008/gr_171947_2008.html
- (2) Dolomite in Manila Bay 'white beach' won't cause health risks, DOH now says | <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1333410/dolomite-in-manila-bay-white-beach-wont-cause-health-risks-doh-now-says>
- (3) <http://www.infrawatchph.com/2020/09/04/manila-bay-white-sand-project-costs-p795k-per-meter/>
- (4) <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2020/09/09/2041170/denr-manila-bay-beach-nourishment-not-part-nedas-master-plan>
- (5) <https://news.abs-cbn.com/video/news/09/07/20/cebu-officials-in-the-dark-about-white-sand-for-manila-bay>
- (6) <https://www.cnn.ph/news/2020/9/8/cebu-cease-and-desist-dolomite-mining-firms.html>

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