



MEETING ON THE EMERGING WATER QUALITY CONCERNS OF BACUIT AND EL NIDO BAYS

Minutes of Meeting

Date: 13 January 2023

Time Started: 10:20 AM

Venue: Virtual Meeting via ZOOM

ATTENDEES

1. RD Azucena C. Pallugna	Department of Tourism (DOT)
2. Faye Angeli Reyes	Department of Tourism (DOT)
3. Gilmore C. Apolinario	Department of Tourism (DOT)
4. Dir. Niño Rey C. Estoya	Palawan Council for Sustainable Development (PCSD)
5. Engr. Madrono Cabrestante Jr.	Palawan Council for Sustainable Development (PCSD)
6. Jesus E. Bream	Palawan Council for Sustainable Development (PCSD)
7. Dr. Rommel Liza	Department of Health (DOH)
8. Engr. Nillette Fidel	Department of Health (DOH)
9. Michael Casto A. Ras II	Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG)
10. Nathan L. Tambobong	National Water Resources Board (NWRB)
11. Conrado M. Corpuz	DENR – CENRO Taytay
12. Mildred Suza	ENTMRPA PAMO
13. Steven John B. Andao	ENTMRPA PAMO
14. Engr. Raul B. Maximo	LGU El Nido – MENRO
15. Meriam G. Arzaga	LGU El Nido – MENRO
16. Sharmaine Tourism Office	LGU El Nido – Municipal Tourism Office (MTO)
17. Katherine Cane Baluarte	LGU El Nido – Municipal Health Office (MHO)
18. RD Joe Amil M. Salino	Environmental Management Bureau (EMB)
19. Maevelyn Kathryn D. Tupasi	Environmental Management Bureau (EMB)
20. Jane T. Dumenden	Environmental Management Bureau (EMB)
21. Adz. Hazen M. Dimapilis	Environmental Management Bureau (EMB)
22. Engr. Ma. Kimberly B. Evora	Environmental Management Bureau (EMB)

HIGHLIGHTS:

- The meeting started with a prayer led by Engr. Ma. Kimberly B. Evora at 10:20 AM, then proceeded by acknowledging the presence of the attendees by Mr. Adz Hazen M. Dimapilis. The agenda for the meeting was (1) Water Quality of Bacuit and El Nido Bay (2) Carrying Capacity, especially in some island destinations (3) Groundwater Quality (4) Connection to El Nido Sewerage and Solid Waste Treatment Plant which was discussed by Ms. Maevelyn Kathryn D. Tupasi.
- Ms. Tupasi presented the Issues on the Coastal Waters of Bacuit Bay and its Proposed Action. RD Joe Amil M. Salino, Regional Director of EMB MIMAROPA remarked that due to the emerging water quality analysis, there should be an approach to formulate interventions. RD Azucena C. Pallugna, Regional Director of DOT MIMAROPA asked if there is already an established carrying capacity in the area. PASu Mildred Suza answered that there were two (2) lagoons that have established carrying capacity (*Big Lagoon – 720 visitors/day, Small Lagoon – 360 visitors/day, indicated under PAMB Resolution No.2017-05*). She also added that the whole of El Nido has conducted a Carrying Capacity Study, however, there were some conditional constraints to be complied with by the local government. RD Pallugna also requested the Municipal Tourism Office for the number of visitors in the lagoons or the El Nido.
- Ms. Katherine Cane Baluarte from the MHO stated that they were aware of the Acute Gastroenteritis (AGE) cases in El Nido, however, based on the number of cases, it was still below the epidemic



threshold. Moreover, they have already given recommendations for food preparation, and they also conducted regular water testing in commercial drinking water resources. Ms. Tupasi inquired if the testing equipment to determine the potability of the water is available to all. Ms. Baluarte answered that El Nido is a beneficiary of the Colilert Machine, which was used for testing the public water drinking water sources.

- Engr. Madrono Cabrestante Jr. of PCSD asked if all the outfall was connected to the El Nido STP. Ms. Tupasi replied that not all the outfalls were connected, particularly the one in the Corong-corong which has an issue in the construction of the cluster tanks, and according to the representatives from the El Nido STP, the rest of the outfalls will be connected in the STP.
- Engr. Cabrestante Jr. also asked the MHO if there are still users of shallow wells to which Ms. Baluarte answered that there are still users as there is still a limitation in the capacity of the water service providers operating in the area.
- RD Pallugna also asked if the number of boats that enters the lagoon was being controlled. PASu Suza stated that the boats were only anchored in the opening of the lagoon and were not allowed inside the lagoon. Moreover, there were kayaks available to the visitors for them to explore the inside of the lagoon. Approximately 60 visitors per hour were accommodated in the area.
- RD Salino asked if the proposed “No Swimming Zone” in the area was re-enforced and suggested putting up notices, especially in the Masagana, Maligaya, and Buena Suerte. Ms. Tupasi added that the “No Swimming Zone” posting in the area was never lifted, however, over time the signage became dilapidated. Ms. Tupasi suggested re-printing these signages for the población area. Engr. Raul Maximo, MENRO of El Nido will discuss the said issue with the mayor. He also added that the community was against the putting of the barricade in the area. He also added that during the unmonitored after-office hours, there are some foreigners that swim in the area. It was also suggested that the parameters and the standards should be incorporated into the notices.
- RD Pallugna also raised her concern about putting up the signage and added that it should be talked about first with consideration to the reactions from foreigners and the media. She also suggested conducting an IEC campaign, educating the local community on the effect of the high coliform concentration. Additionally, she expressed her willingness to discuss it with the mayor with support from the concerned agencies. Dr. Rommel Lizan also gave the same sentiments to be invited to the meeting.
- Ms. Sharmaine Hadjj Nur from the MTO added that their office has martial dispatch on the beach, she also stated that it was not within the task of these martial to drive out the swimmers in the area. She also stated that the dispatching area for the island tours is the same as areas with failing water quality. Due to limited dispatching docks in the town, some people advance through the waters just to get into their boats. They also get in touch with the Philippine Ports Authority regarding the operation of the port.
- Dir. Niño Rey C. Estoya from the PCSD stated that they conduct evaluation and monitoring of projects. He declared commitment to the occasional monitoring of the no-swimming zone to countercheck. The PCSD also have an IEC Division in which they can integrate the agreed conveyance to the public in their program.
- Engr. Maximo explained that the issue regarding the STP is encouraging the residents and the business establishments to connect to STP. He also suggested adding the connectivity to the STP in the conditions under the Strategic Environmental Plan (SEP) Clearance of the PCSD. Dir. Estoya affirm that they could add it to the terms and conditions of the existing SEP Clearance as a supplemental and it could be also added to the new SEP Clearance.
- Ms. Baluarte raised the issues regarding STP such as the adjacent water line of MEEDO and the sewer line of STP which was currently rehabilitated by the El Nido STP. Ms. Nur also added the concern of the private sector on the finalized rate of STP.
- Dir. Estoya has inquired about the data that is needed to justify the incorporation of the connectivity of the establishments in the SEP Clearance during the Council Meeting which is chaired by the Provincial Governor. He also asked if such terms can also be included in the Mayor’s Permit and the Environmental Compliance Certificate (ECC). Ms. Nur stated that it was already included, however, it was not completely implemented as there are some areas that are not serviceable. Dir. Estoya asked if the



serviceable area can be identified, Ms. Nur added that STP already has a list of serviceable areas. RD Salino stated that the EMB can only issue a Notice of Violation (NOV) and enforce RA 9275.

- Mr. Michael Casto A. Ras II from the DILG MIMAROPA disclosed that they already conducted an inspection of establishments last 2019-2020 in which the data gathered was provided to the LGU. He also stated that they have received an email from the LGU regarding the moratorium convened by the directors from the DOT, DILG, and DENR, prohibiting the new construction until the establishment of the carrying capacity. Last 2021, the LGU requested to lift the moratorium as the carrying capacity was already established.
- Ms. Tupasi continued to present the issues or concerns and its proposed action. Engr. Nillette Fidel from DOH MIMAROPA discussed that they have conducted drinking water quality testing of various establishments in coordination with the National Reference Laboratory (NRL). She also added that in the case of households, they already have existing septic tanks of which some are bottomless. She also requested assistance from the DOT, as some of the accommodations have their own water source, which should be strictly coordinated with the local health office to ensure their water quality. In addition, another possible source of contamination is the tours that serve food on the boats. She also disclosed that the local government has been required to conduct Local Drinking Water Surveillance (LDWQMS) through the creation of the Local Drinking Water Quality Monitoring Committee (LDWQMC) under the Joint Administration of DOH and DILG. The LGU El Nido already forwarded their signed resolution of their created LDWQMC, and the next step will be to provide them with technical assistance. Ms. Tupasi will be requesting the said resolution from the LGU.
- Ms. Baluarte asked about the next step of EMB in the occurrence of resistance against an Order after the issuance of the Cease of Desist Order (CDO). RD Salino discussed the process of the CDO and in cases of deliberate disregard of the Order, the next step of the PAB is to recommend the Regional Office to file a Criminal Case against the involved establishment.
- Dir. Estoya asked which agency could require the mandatory potability testing of all groundwater sources and order the closure of the sources that failed to meet the PNSDW under the proposed action. Engr. Fidel clarified that the water resources must be secured with a water permit from the NWRB. After securing, the water service provider must process their application to the DOH for the development of their drinking water. In regard to mandatory testing, DOH conducts monitoring. However, the provider has the responsibility to send their samples to DOH Accredited Water Analysis Laboratory and the results must be submitted for reference and monitoring by the local. In case of failure to pass the standard, an Order (*Recommendation of Closure*) will be issued through the local government to the service provider, notifying them of their failed drinking water quality. The finding and hearings are being overseen at the local level.
- Ms. Tupasi requested Engr. Maximo of their Environmental Code, which was also requested by Ms. Rio Reyes, Environmental Monitoring Officer of EMB. He added that they currently have the not-yet updated Environmental Code and he will try to request from the Sangguniang Bayan an e-copy of it.
- The notices to be created for the “No Swimming Zone” will be shown to the governing board before its reproduction with the inclusion of the necessary information. RD Pallugna agreed to the no swimming zone, however, for the others, she has to consult it first in their Information Department. RD Pallugna also requested a copy of the issues and concerns presented in the meeting which she will be presenting to their Secretary. She also requested a copy of the report made by DILG as well as the result of their inspection which was mentioned earlier, and other necessary documents and reports. RD Pallugna also agreed in conducting the IEC Campaign.
- Ms. Tupasi stated that the date for the IEC Campaign in El Nido will be discussed with RD Salino. RD Pallugna requested for the IEC Campaign to be conducted immediately as the peak season is approaching.
- The carrying capacity study conducted by the PASu will also be requested.
- Ms. Tupasi reiterated the proposed action regarding the presented issues and concerns which includes the status of the outfalls which will be coordinated with the El Nido STP, and identification of the docking area which will be a concern to the LGU.



- Ms. Baluarte added the requirement of the MARINA to the tourist boat to put a toilet facility, which it was observed that these toilets are bottomless. They already raised the issues; however, she is requesting help from the attendees to raise it to the MARINA to remove such requirements as it gave false assurance to the visitors. Ms. Tupasi replied that a communication letter will be sent from the EMB, or it can also be carried out by the MHO.
- RD Salino asked if LGU has an ordinance regarding the said issue of portable toilets on the bangka. Engr. Maximo answered that there was no issued ordinance. RD Salino suggested formally writing to the mayor regarding the said issue. Dir. Estoya suggested to RD Salino to also write a letter addressed to the PCSD in order to discuss it at their Council meeting.
- Ms. Tupasi recapitulated the agreements made during the meeting. Dir. Estoya suggested having the EMB discuss the raised issues at the Council meeting (*hybrid meeting*) on January 26, to which RD Salino agreed. Dir. Estoya will coordinate accordingly with EMB for the presentation.
- The meeting adjourned at 12:00 noon.

Prepared by:

ENGR. MA. KIMBERLY B. EVORA
BENB WQMA Secretariat

Reviewed by:

JANE T. DUMENDEN
BENB WQMA Secretariat
Head, Ambient Water

Attested by:

MAEVELYN KATHRYN D. TUPASI
BENB WQMA Secretariat
OIC, AMTSS

Noted by:

ENGR. PABLITO M. ESTORQUE JR.
Chief, EMED