



CONCEPT NOTE: POLICY DIALOGUE ON THE ESTABLISHMENT OF COASTAL GREENBELT ZONES

Date: November 16, 2023

Time: 8:00 AM – 4:00 PM

Venue: Bulwagan, Ninoy Aquino Parks & Wildlife Center, Quezon City

OVERVIEW

The Philippines is an archipelagic country with about 18,000 km (about 11,184.68 mi) of shorelines and vast areas of mangroves totaling to 500,000 hectares in the early 1900s. Unfortunately, over 50% of these mangroves have been lost, primarily due to fishpond conversion and other coastal projects. This has led to the country being ranked as the second worst country in Southeast Asia in terms of mangrove losses.

Mangrove ecosystems are crucial for many coastal communities as they provide livelihood opportunities, food sources, and protection against coastal hazards. Given the country's longest coastlines, which serve as pathways for tropical cyclones coming from the Pacific Ocean, mangroves and beach forests offer sustainable and cost-efficient ways for fishers and rural communities to protect themselves, their properties and communities from the devastating impacts of natural disasters. Additionally, mangroves play an essential role on a global scale in stabilizing the climate as they have significant carbon storage and sequestration potential considered to be greater than that of tropical forests.

However, despite its critical importance, mangroves remain undervalued and severely threatened. These forests face a multitude of challenges from all fronts- deforestation, land development, reclamation, pollution, conversion of mangroves to fishpond, on the one hand, and climate change and associated sea level rise on the other. Improper planting practices, frequent occurrence of stronger typhoons, and weak enforcement have further hindered mangrove conservation efforts.

Recognizing the importance of mangroves and the threats they face, Oceana officially launched its campaign to restore mangrove forest areas in the Philippines in March 2022, with the aim of campaigning to secure the approval of a national law to facilitate the restoration and preservation of mangroves and beach forests in order to combat coastal erosion and mitigate the adverse effects of climate change.

On May 22, 2023, the House of Representatives passed unanimously [House Bill No. 7767](#), which mandates integrated coastal management as a national strategy for the holistic and sustainable management of coastal and related ecosystems, establishing the national coastal greenbelt action plan, and introduces supporting mechanisms for its implementation, including the allocation of funds.

If the Senate passes its counterpart bill, this will lead to the institutionalization and integration of currently fragmented mangrove conservation policies. By aligning efforts and resources, the bill sets the stage for significant improvements in the management and protection of mangroves, ultimately benefiting both the environment and the communities that rely on these vital ecosystems.

Four (4) Senators have sponsored separate bills for the establishment of coastal greenbelt zones in the country:

- [SB 113](#) (Establishing the National Coastal Greenbelt Plan) filed by Sen. Nancy Binay)
- [SB 591](#) (National Coastal Greenbelt Program) filed by Sen. Risa Hontiveros)
- [SB 1117](#) (Establishing the National Coastal Greenbelt Zones and National Coastal Greenbelt Management Action Plan) filed by Sen. Loren Legarda)
- [SB 1237](#) (Establishing the National Coastal Greenbelt Zones and National Coastal Greenbelt Management Action Plan) filed by Sen. Cynthia Villar)

Furthermore, if the National Coastal Greenbelt Law is passed, this will provide the overarching framework and general guiding principles for implementing a science-based and cost-effective program to protect, restore and manage mangrove resources. With this law, appropriate agencies and government instrumentalities will have clearly defined mandates, standards, targets, and resources to implement and operationalize plans for the establishment and management of coastal greenbelt zones around the country.

At the local level, interest in the establishments of coastal greenbelts has grown among decision-makers due to the heavy losses and damages suffered by communities due to our extreme vulnerability to natural hazards and impacts of climate change, local governments have seen that those communities with mangrove forests are spared the devastation due to storm surges and strong typhoons. A national law to protect mangrove and beach forests, supported by local ordinances designating local coastal greenbelts, will provide a comprehensive and integrated framework for protecting and conserving coastal mangrove and beach forests.

Objectives:

With these things in mind, Oceana in collaboration with Wetlands International and the Climate Change Commission will organize a policy dialogue which aims to:

1. Engage legislators as key decisionmakers in the establishment of coastal greenbelts in the country;
2. Raise awareness and understanding among national government agencies and local government units about the importance and urgency of establishing coastal greenbelts and their role in ecological conservation, climate change mitigation, fisheries production, and carbon sequestration.
3. Provide a platform where experts and stakeholders can articulate and share their insights and initiatives concerning coastal greenbelt establishment.
4. Foster a meaningful engagement among stakeholders including experts and interest groups in the best practices and trends in coastal greenbelt establishment and management.
5. Facilitate a dialogue between them and legislators where interest groups can share information on emerging trends, research findings, and best practices that can inform legislative work.