DOT, DENR act to ‘save’ Boracay
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THE Department of Tourism (DOT) and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) embarked on a joint effort to save Boracay Island, Aklan Province from continuous destruction.

DOT Secretary Wanda Tulfo-Teo and DENR Secretary Roy A. Cimatu took off on an aerial survey of the world-renowned island, which is fast losing the balance between environmental conservation and tourism development.

The two Cabinet officials later presided over a multi-sectoral meeting, including the island’s tourism stakeholders, to address pressing concerns about on and offshore pollution, brought about by waste disposal.

“It’s a shame that Boracay, which has repeatedly been recognized by prestigious travel magazines as the World’s Most Beautiful Island, may yet end up a paradise lost if water contamination continues,” Teo said.

International visitors flock to Boracay for sun and beach holiday, water sports, scuba diving all year round totaling two million, contributing nearly P50 billion in annual receipts. It has also become a frequent luxury cruise ship destination.

The 10.32 square-kilometer island paradise is nestled between the Sulu Sea and the Sibuyan Sea, comprised by three barangays Yapak, Bulabog, and Manok-Manok belonging to the municipality of Malay, Aklan and with an aggregate population of 34,000.

Teo blamed the lack of proper sewerage system, as well as a number of business establishments that tap and dispose their waste through the rainwater drainage system all the way to the sea.

Another major problem that prompted the on-site meeting is the alarming recurrence of flooding in most parts of the Boracay tourist hub, particularly the flash flooding that occurred during the typhoon Urduja last December 18.

Meanwhile, TIEZA (Tourism Infrastructure and Enterprise Authority), DOT’s infrastructure arm, will pour in P400 million more to the ongoing drainage project valued at P716 million. Phase II is aimed at alleviating heavy flooding in said area.

Cimatu disclosed he had called the attention of Malay Mayor Ciceron Cawaling regarding the worsening garbage problem.

Cawaling, along with Aklan Governor Florencio Miraflores, urged the Duterte administration to provide more funds.

“We appeal to both Secretaries to adopt Boracay,” Miraflores urged the Cabinet officials.

In reaction, Teo and Cimatu disclosed that an Executive Order drafted by an inter-agency committee will be submitted to President Duterte to address once and for all the serious problems besetting Boracay. The inter-agency committee will include other government agencies crucial to Boracay, primarily Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH).

Teo said the list of over 100 establishment violators will be divulged soon while Cimatu vowed to conduct an individual inspection of their sewer facilities.

Other problems tackled during the meeting include the impact of overcrowding and overdevelopment where beachfront establishments have extended too close to the shore.

“We can only maintain Boracay’s picture perfect qualities if we can strictly enforce responsible tourism. It’s the only way we can support a sustainable and inclusive tourism program,” Teo added.

Cimatu challenged all local tourism stakeholders, including hoteliers and travel operators, to actively participate in preserving the natural beauty of Boracay.