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BORACAY DOWNTIME – Once teeming with foreign and local tourists, only local residents can be seen strolling on this stretch of White Beach in Boracay Island on Friday, a day after it was closed to visitors for a six-month rehabilitation and cleanup drive. (Tara Yap)

Boracay residents and stakeholders showed overwhelming support and cooperation as the six-month rehabilitation of the famed beach destination got underway last week, according to the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR).

“We anticipated confusion and disturbance among the residents and stakeholders, but thank God there was none. We’re very happy because of the warm reception of the people,” DENR Secretary Roy Cimatu said.

“We thought we would not get their unity and cooperation but I was surprised. They already understood and accepted the fact that we have to clean it and that they have to show their cooperation,” he added.

According to Cimatu, around 98 percent of Boracay residents and business owners have volunteered and agreed to self demolish illegal structures.

“This are around 300 establishments causing road obstruction,” he said.

“Around 90 percent of them have given their waiver for us to proceed with the demolition. Unlike before that they were threatening to file cases against us,” he added.

At the same time, Cimatu said the DENR will ask displaced Boracay workers joining the cash-for-work program administered by the Department of Social Welfare and Development to help in the cleanup of wetlands.

Cimatu underscored the importance of wetlands that serve as the island’s water filter.

“Unfortunately, there are buildings on the wetlands and informal settlers have built houses beside them. This has resulted in poor quality of water draining into the sea,” he lamented.

Boracay has nine wetlands but only four are undamaged.

The DENR aims to recover the rest in the course of the rehabilitation.

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