

# New council to help protect Lake Lanao

By John Unson

(philstar.com) | Updated January 13, 2017 - 2:49pm



*ARMM public works officials inspect construction of a boat dock along one side of Lake Lanao in Lanao del Sur.*

**John Unson, file**

COTABATO CITY, Philippines — Security officials on Friday pledged support to a new council for protection of Lake Lanao, which runs electric plants supplying three-fourths of Mindanao's daily power needs.

The inter-agency Watershed Management Council was created in Cagayan de Oro City during a two-day workshop early this week among representatives from the Lanao del Sur provincial government, from different law enforcement agencies and the military.

The workshop, which also involved officials from the Environment and Local Government departments, was meant to build consensus on how to improve cooperation with the national government to address environmental issues affecting Lake Lanao.

Chief Superintendent Theodore Sindac, regional police director of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, said on Friday their units in Lanao del Sur and other quick deployment groups in their headquarters in Camp S.K. Pendatun in Parang town in Maguindanao are ready to help the council enforce its environmental protection regulations.

"We are glad that the Lanao del Sur provincial government and agencies of ARMM are helping each other protect the lake and the watersheds around it," Sindac said.

Lanao del Sur Gov. Soraya Alonto-Adiong, who was named pioneer presiding chairperson of the newly-formed council, said their paramount concern is to complement the effort of the national government in managing Lake Lanao and its watersheds efficiently.

The protection and management of Lake Lanao in Lanao del Sur province, touted as the world's largest and surrounded by hinterland watersheds with thick tropical rainforests, is an exclusive authority of Malacañang.

The national government has never devolved to any local public entity the management of Lake Lanao and its watersheds even after the creation of ARMM in 1990.

“Lake Lanao is connected to the Maranaws and the people in Mindanao. We ought to help the national government manage it well,” the governor told The STAR on Friday.

The downstream flow of water from Lake Lanao, which drains at lowlands and seaside areas in Iligan City and Lanao del Norte, propels state-owned hydroelectric plants producing three-fourths of Mindanao’s daily power needs.

The lake is a strong icon of Maranaw identity as a highland dwelling Muslim group. The term Maranaw means “people of the lake” in their vernacular.

Hadji Kahal Kedtag, regional secretary of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources-ARMM, said their provincial office in Lanao del Sur will also support to the programs of the council.

Kedtag and provincial personnel of DENR-ARMM padlocked last month three sawmills in Maguing, Lanao del Sur and seized P1.6 million worth of timber poached in protected watershed areas around the municipality.

Officials of the Army’s 103rd Infantry Brigade, which operates in the towns surrounded by forests comprising the protected watersheds of the lake also committed to help the DENR-ARMM and the watershed protection council.