

DENR makes final plea to Laguna Lake pen owners to demolish fish cages

Written by **PNA**

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The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) has issued its final appeal to operators of fish pens and cages at the Laguna de Bay to demolish them themselves before the department begins a massive operation this month to clear the lake of illegal structures.

National Anti-Environmental Crime Task Force (NAECTF) head Arturo Valdez said the DENR is still giving the operators a chance to save the enclosure materials of their pens and cages.

“Once we begin the operation, all assets affected by our dismantling activities will be confiscated in favor of the government,” said Valdez, who is in charge of the dismantling operation, along with the Laguna Lake Development Authority (LLDA) and concerned local government units.

The operation is in line with the directive of President Duterte to dismantle big fish pens and cages in Laguna Lake to allow small fishermen to gain access to traditional fishing grounds.

“That is the presidential instruction after all, and the DENR is dead set on implementing it unless of course a new directive from no less than President Duterte is given,” Valdez said, advising those seeking to stop the planned dismantling to direct their appeal not to the DENR, but “to the President instead.”

According to the DENR official, some operators have already voluntarily dismantled their facilities as early as last month, allowing them to keep their assets, especially the fish stock that they were still able to sell in the market.

Valdez said the DENR and the LLDA are currently mapping out a “phase-by-phase approach” for the clearing operation.

He added that all aquaculture facilities in the lake area will be covered by the dismantling operation since the permits given to operators already expired last December 31 and will no longer be renewed by the DENR.

“We have imposed a total moratorium on the renewal of permits (starting January 1 this year). This means the pens and cages can be dismantled anytime,” Valdez said.

“The dismantling of fish pens (and cages) is not simple. There are posts there (and nets), that is why it is better for the owners to dismantle it themselves. You take care of your materials, those are expensive after all.”

He pointed out that the only way to save the country’s largest lake and give access to small fishermen is to dismantle all illegal structures in it.

He said these structures also obstruct the natural flow of water, which is necessary to cleanse the lake of pollutants from households and industries, as well as the chemical components of fish feeds.

Valdez said the demolition of illegal structures at the Laguna Lake is part of an overall plan to save the water body from further ecological destruction.

Another key component of the Laguna Lake rehabilitation plan is to stop the discharge of pollutants from industrial and domestic sources, and sedimentation and siltation from degraded watershed surrounding the lake.

The rehabilitation plan also includes reconfiguring the sewage systems of lakeside communities and reforesting surrounding mountains.