

Año out to file raps vs Boracay execs

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ILOILO CITY — Local Government Secretary Eduardo Año has tasked a special team to investigate and file charges against officials responsible for the degradation of world-famous Boracay Island over the past 10 years.

Año said the investigation would zero in on officials and agencies that issued permits for the construction of structures in no-build areas from 2008 to 2018, as well as individuals who connived with them.

The team, headed by Assistant Secretary Epimaco Densing III and Senior Executive Assistant Jerry Loresco, would also look into the utilization of a P75 environmental fee collected from visitors to the island.

Mayor Ciceron Cawaling of Malay town in Aklan on Wednesday decried the “finger-pointing,” but asked property owners to “self-demolish” illegal structures in beaches, including Puka, Tubhan, Kandingon, Tambisa-an, Malabunot, Manoc-Manoc proper, Bulabog Balinghai and Diniwid.

Due process

“We are ready to face whatever investigation and charges against us. We believe that we have tried to address the problems of the island. We only ask that due process will be followed but we will also defend ourselves legally,” Cawaling said.

Cawaling urged business owners to dismantle structures on sidewalks and road right of way along Long Beach, famed for its white powdery sand.

Pimentel for closure

D'Mall, a commercial establishment on the island, said it had always complied with solid waste management and easement regulations, and had built a drainage system and a sewerage treatment plant.

Senate President Aquilino Pimentel III, for his part, backed the planned temporary closure of Boracay to give way to its full rehabilitation.

“It is only logical to close Boracay for renovations, so to speak. We must carefully assess the damage to the local environment and take the necessary steps for cleanup,” he said.

Tourism and local government officials are pushing for a 60-day closure of business establishments during the rainy season when tourist arrivals are low.

But other senators, including Cynthia Villar, had objected to this, saying it was bad for business and publicity.

Villar, chair of the committee on environment and natural resources, also said there was no conflict of interest on her part when she led an inquiry into Boracay's environmental woes, although her family owned a 50-room hotel and a stake in a company selling condominiums. —*With reports from Jocelyn R, Uy and Christine Avendaño*

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