

# DENR vows speedy Manila Bay rehab

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THE Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) has committed to take swift action in saving Manila Bay by coming up with a plan of action in January next year.

Environment Secretary Roy Cimatu said the agency is considering garbage containment in esteros (creeks) as an immediate aid while taking into account the construction of proper sewerage lines and relocation of informal settlers as the long-term solutions.

“What I will do by January 15 is to present the problem, present also the probable solution and receive offer of assistance in terms of materials [and] suggestions,” Cimatu told reporters.

The cost of rehabilitating Manila Bay has not been included in the DENR budget but Cimatu said his department might use other resources to start working on the major cleanup of the bay.

“We will be using our resources for the meantime. We have some financial resources from the Clean Water Act embedded in our budget. I was also offered some assistance coming from other industries to help us in [the rehabilitation],” Cimatu said.

He said informal settlers throw tons of garbage into creeks every day.

Undersecretary Benny Antiporda said the agency also aims to reduce the coliform level in Manila Bay. Records showed the fecal coliform level had reached as high as 330 million most probable number (MPN) per 100 milliliters (ml) while the safe level is only 100 MPN/100ml.

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“The main objective is to contain the [solid wastes] in an area and have them treated only on that site so that other bodies of water won’t be poisoned. We will cluster all areas that we can [identify] and then we will contain them,” Antiporda said.

“But this is just a temporary solution. Still, our long term solution is the relocation [of informal settlers]. Of course, this will be with the help of the local government up to the barangay (village) level,” he added.

Ilarde lauds Cimatú

Former senator Eddie Ilarde lauded Cimatú for his plan to rehabilitate Manila Bay.

However, he said the DENR should include the Pasig River and Laguna Bay in the clean-up program.

“We admire Secretary Roy Cimatú for focusing attention on the alarming problem of dirt and scum in the bay, which I interconnected with Pasig River and Laguna de Bay. A simultaneous clean-up and dredging of these three bodies of water shall alleviate the situation, which if not addressed soon, can cause even more serious consequences,” Ilarde said in a statement.

He said a “no-nonsense government-private sector undertaking” is needed.

“It is gratifying that President [Rodrigo] Duterte is the first president to condemn the mindless destruction of the environment such as open-pit mining, the degradation of our waterways and other forms of environmental destruction,” he added.

Ilarde’s proposal to dredge the three waterways was supported by urban planner Felino “Jun” Palafox Jr.

“Clearing these waterways, first collecting millions of tons of garbage and muck can bring back their natural depth and unhampered flow of the water, in effect shall make their rehabilitation and development easier,” Palafox said.

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