

DENR: Water management office to prioritize supply projects, resolving internal conflicts

By Paige Javier, CNN Philippines

<https://www.cnnphilippines.com/news/2023/5/8/denr-water-resources-management-office.html>

Metro Manila (CNN Philippines, May 8) -- The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) believes the creation of the Water Resources Management Office (WRMO) will help resolve immediate concerns on the impending water crisis, instead of just being a stop-gap measure.

"I don't see it as a stop-gap measure but definitely it works on a very short term. It doesn't look at medium- or even long-term at this time...The water crisis is already happening and therefore some of the solutions need to happen not next year, not 2024, 2025 but this year," DENR Undersecretary for Environmental Science Carlos David said at a Senate hearing on Monday.

President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. signed Executive Order 22 on April 27, creating the water management office under the DENR. In line with the EO, all water-related agencies will be attached to the DENR like the National Water Resources Board (NWRB), Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS), Local Water Utilities Administration (LWUA) and the network of local water districts.

The WRMO's main priority is to resolve conflicts between water-related government agencies now that they're under one umbrella, the DENR said at the hearing.

The next concern is to implement and manage the 1,374 water supply projects, mostly in countryside barangays nationwide. The funds are lodged under the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) and Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG).

"A total of ₱14.6 billion is earmarked for water supply projects for this year. The amount is more than the total amount of water supply projects for the last ten years," David said.

"Most of the projects would be in the provision of water through deep wells using solar powered pumps," he explained, adding that these could supply water to up to 1,500 people at the barangay level.

The DENR said the water supply projects will be more sustainable under the WRMO since there will be funds for maintenance and operational expenses.

At the hearing, Sen. Pia Cayetano, Sustainable Development Goals, Innovation and Future Thinking committee chair, asked how the WRMO and the NWRB would differ in functions.

The DENR said the role of the NWRB would remain the same and that the responsibilities of the attached agencies would not overlap.

The Department of Health (DOH) stressed the need to update the Code of Sanitation since the last version was enacted in 1976. DOH Health Promotion Bureau Division Chief Dr. Rosalind Vianzon believes there should also be a single agency to regulate water sanitation to end the practice of open defecation in many municipalities.

The Department of Science and Technology (DOST), Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) and National Economic Development Authority (NEDA) pledged their support for the creation of the water management office.

Meanwhile, the MWSS and NWRB said they are currently implementing programs to ensure water security ahead of the impending El Niño.

According to the NWRB, an estimated 11 million Filipino families lack access to clean water in the country, forcing them to rely on water sources that are not always reliable and potable.