

DENR to tackle water quality issues in prime tourist destinations

By Elmer Badilla, Palawan News

Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo Loyzaga, together with Cabinet members, convened over the weekend to strategize immediate actions addressing significant environmental concerns in the country's prime tourist destinations.

Key attendees included Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) Secretary Benjamin Abalos, Department of Tourism (DOT) Secretary Christina Frasco, and Department of Health Secretary Teodoro Herbosa.

Local chief executives from the five Green Economy Model (GEM) sites—El Nido and Coron in Palawan, Panglao in Bohol, Puerto Galera in Oriental Mindoro, and Siargao Island in Surigao del Norte—also participated.

The GEM sites, crucial tourist destinations, undergo close monitoring by national government agencies, focusing on water resource management, solid waste management, land use planning, enforcement of easement zones, and public-private partnerships.

Concerns raised during the meeting included water quality, solid waste management, and water security.

Local executives presented initial actions and proposed further collaboration with the national government.

According to DENR, its Water Resource Management Office is prepared to offer technical assistance on water-related matters, emphasizing the necessity of a stable water supply for all local government units.

Loyzaga affirmed DENR's commitment to collaborating with national government agencies and LGUs to tackle solid waste and plastic pollution issues, including initiatives with development partners like the 60 million euro Green Economy Program.

Frasco shared the DOT's major programs, focusing on tourism area development and call center establishment, while Herbosa reiterated the DOH's ongoing efforts to establish new hospitals and expand health care centers.

Abalos urged LGUs to implement immediate measures to address water quality and solid waste challenges within six months, expressing concerns about potential moratoriums similar to Boracay's rehabilitation.

Immediate steps include a collaborative Waste and Water Summit to accelerate actions against waste management and water security challenges.

The summit aims to enhance awareness, operationalize commitments, and strengthen coordination between national government agencies, LGUs, and various stakeholders for sustainable solutions.

Participants included government agencies, local executives, experts, and representatives from the private sector, civil society, academia, and other key sectors, emphasizing a holistic approach to address these critical issues.