

DENR, five provinces want Verde Island Passage declared as 'protected area'

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Metro Manila (CNN Philippines, May 9) — There is a move to declare the Verde Island Passage (VIP), dubbed the "Amazon of the oceans," as a protected area.

The governors of five provinces, namely, Batangas, Oriental Mindoro, Occidental Mindoro, Marinduque, and Romblon — areas that surround the VIP — and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) are pushing for the declaration.

"This highest level of protection for what is touted as the center of the world's marine biodiversity will keep VIP as a sanctuary to thousands of marine species and off limits to business activities that will threaten its pristine ecosystem," Environment Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga said Tuesday.

The VIP, which is part of the Coral Triangle, is home to over 1,700 fish species, more than 300 coral species, and thousands of other marine organisms, according to the Protect VIP coalition.

The DENR said the marine corridor provides livelihood and other benefits to over two million people.

Loyzaga said there have been a number of proposed development projects in the VIP since early 2020, "such as submarine cable/pipe laying and jetty construction."

"With this, there is a need to study what possible regulations may be imposed to ensure that there is a balance between development and conservation," she said.

The joint call to declare the VIP as a protected area was agreed upon during a meeting among Loyzaga, Batangas Gov. Hermilando Mandanas, and Marinduque Gov. Presbitero Velasco Jr. They also discussed the threat of the oil spill from the MT Princess Empress which sank off Oriental Mindoro in late February.

The Philippine Coast Guard earlier reported that the oil slick reached Verde Island last March 20, but later said there were no more traces of the sheen on the island and its vicinity waters.