

DENR, LLDA targeting completion of Laguna Lake clearing operations before July

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The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and Laguna Lake Development Authority (LLDA) want Laguna De Bay be totally cleared of illegal large fish pens and cages by July or before President Rodrigo Duterte delivers his second State of the Nation Address (SONA).

In a statement, the DENR assured that there's going to be no let-up in the campaign to clear Laguna de Bay of all illegal structures even if it would turn to a loss of P50 million in revenues for LLDA.

"The DENR and LLDA plan to finish the clearing operation by the middle of the year, in time for the President's second SONA in July," DENR said in a statement.

To recall, Duterte directed Environment Secretary Regina Lopez to act on the illegal structures within Laguna de Bay during his first SONA last year.

But it was just late last month when the DENR and the LLDA officially started the massive operation to clear Laguna Lake of illegal structures, including large fish pens and cages.

The dismantling operation came more than one month after the DENR declared a one-year moratorium on the issuance of permits for fish pens and cages in Laguna Lake starting January this year.

This means that all structures within the lake are now considered illegal.

The moratorium is expected to result in revenue losses for the LLDA to the tune of R50 million. The agency usually collects fees and charges from fishpen operators.

DENR Undersecretary and National Anti-Environmental Crime Task Force (NAECTF) head Art Valdez, who is in charge of the Laguna Lake clearing operations together with LLDA General Manager Jaime Medina, said the DENR would be willing to provide technical support to the LLDA to make up for the projected revenue losses so the latter can continue to fulfill its mandate.

"The dismantling operation remains a priority in NAECTF's order of battle, and the DENR support, which is meant to boost the law enforcement capabilities of LLDA, will increasingly become stronger in the days to come," Valdez said.

The DENR will also help the LLDA in the rehabilitation of the entire lake, which includes addressing illegal dumping of household, industrial and chemical wastes, he added.

During the resumption of the dismantling operation on Feb. 14, the demolition team dismantled two fishpens covering a total of 76 hectares in Laguna Lake.

The structures are owned by Seven Eleven Fishing Corp. and Habagat Multi-purpose Cooperative, both in Binangonan town in Rizal province.

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