

PBBM signs EO creating DENR's water management office amid El Niño threat

President Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr. has signed an executive order creating the Water Resources Management Office (WRMO) to integrate and harmonize government efforts that will manage Philippine water resources and ensure water supply.

The WRMO is under the supervision of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR).

In a statement, Malacañang said Marcos signed EO 22 on Thursday, April 27, mandating the WRMO to “ensure the immediate implementation of the Integrated Water Resources Management in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, and formulate a corresponding Water Resources Master Plan (IWMP).”

The EO, which took effect immediately, came on the heels of the looming El Niño phenomenon that threatens the country’s water supply and availability.

The Palace said the EO aims to address the challenges that affect the management of water resources, citing the increasing demand for water due to population and economic growth, impacts of climate change and the pandemic, and the lack of adequate infrastructure leading to uneven distribution of water resources, among others.

An undersecretary will be appointed by the President to lead the WRMO.

In line with the EO, all water-related agencies will be attached to the DENR, among which are the National Water Resources Board; Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS); Local Water Utilities Administration (LWUA), Laguna Lake Development Authority (LLDA), and the network of local water districts.

These agencies, according to the EO, will have a “collaborative mechanism” under the WRMO to “implement water management programs.”

“To avert water crisis, minimize and avoid conflicts, and consistent with the state’s sole ownership and control over the country’s water resources, it is imperative for the government to integrate and harmonize the policies, programs, and projects of all relevant agencies in the water resource sector in the fulfillment of their complementary governmental mandates,” it read.

Such office is also responsible to “shepherd and champion, together with the Presidential Legislative Liaison Office, the passage of a law creating an apex body such as the proposed Department of Water and/or a regulatory commission on water.”

It is also directed to integrate into the IWMP the various plans of agencies, which include the Philippine Development Plan, the Philippine Water Supply and Sanitation Master Plan, and the National Water Resources Board Security Master Plan.

The WRMO is further tasked to “generate and maintain credible and timely water and sanitation data to aid in evidence-based policy-making, regulations, planning, and implementation.”