

Technical Comments

An Act Establishing the National Coastal Greenbelt Program, Providing Funds Therefor, and for Other Purposes

House Bill No. 527

Senate Bill 2179

The League of Cities of the Philippines recognizes the effort of this committee to pass a bill highlighting the importance of mangrove ecosystems in the country. Of the 145 cities of the Philippines, there are roughly around 124 coastal cities in freshwater, brackish and marine habitats. These cities are often affected by various calamities that threaten the life and properties of communities living in the coastal areas and the river tributaries. Coastal areas, as we know, are still under the jurisdiction of the local government units. Various efforts are being implemented to reforest mangrove areas and to identify sites for protection and management. There are also some coastal areas that are already protected with the support from the national government agencies, development partners and non-governmental organizations.

A. Review of Existing Laws and Proposed Bills

It is recommended for the committee to review other bills filed in both congresses to check and verify redundant provision in some parts of the greenbelt program bill.

1. Revised Forestry Code of the Philippines

Currently, the Environment and Natural Resources Committee of the Philippine Senate is currently updating the law through amendment of the Forestry Code of the Philippines. Mangroves are actually a forest area and establishing a coastal greenbelt can be incorporated in this law.

Under forest protection provision of the law, it is already stated there about the conservation and management of mangrove forests. It is recommended that the national greenbelt program be included in the proposed IRR of the revised bill.

Section 43. *Swamplands and mangrove forests.* Strips of mangrove forest bordering numerous islands which protect the shoreline, the shoreline roads, and even coastal communities from the destructive force of the sea during high winds and typhoons, shall be maintained and shall not be alienated. Such strips must be kept from artificial obstruction so that flood water will flow unimpeded to the sea to avoid flooding or inundation of cultivated areas in the upstream.

2. The Proposed National Coastal Resources Management and Development Act

The House has a pending bill on an enacting a law that specifically focus on coastal resources and management. Creation of a specific provision on coastal greenbelt can be incorporated in this bill.

3. National Fisheries Code of the Philippines

Protection and conservation of our coastal resources is also mentioned in the fisheries code of the Philippines. Specifically stated in the Chapter 1, Section 2, Letter F of the law stating that, it is a responsibility of the state *to manage fishery and aquatic resources, in a manner consistent with the concept of an integrated coastal area management in specific natural fishery management areas, appropriately supported by research, technical services and guidance provided by the State;*

4. National Land Use Act bill

This proposed law mentions some provisions on conservation of mangrove areas.

5. National Arbor Day Law

This legislation mandates local government units to provide time and resources to plant trees and provide budget and manpower to the event.

6. Executive Order 533 on Integrated Coastal Management as a National Strategy to Ensure the Sustainable Development of the Country's Coastal and Marine Environment and Resources

B. Criteria for identifying the National Coastal Greenbelt Area

The bill doesn't specify the criteria for identifying the priority areas that will be declared as NCGA. This will have implication on the budgetary allotment of each agency concerned and the technical preparation required for the agency to appropriate.

C. Timeframe of Identification and Non-priority sites

The bill does not include the time element for the identification of priority sites and non-priority sites. Time is also an essential resource to make the program successful. It is indeed recommended to include timeframe with their corresponding deliverables for the implementing agencies.

D. The Local Coastal Greenbelt Action Plans

We believe that the need to have a separate plan for the coastal greenbelt area will always give detailed provisions of the local government's investment on environmental conservation. But so far, there are at least 27 plans the LGUs are obliged to draft. Instead it will be recommended for the national government to check the CLUP and Annual Investment program of a local government unit contain provisions for the coastal greenbelt area.

Local government units prioritize their investment on areas based on the consultation from their constituents. There are coastal areas in cities which are uninhabited or are not generating resources for the LGUs. Instead it is conserved at its natural state.

E. Local Government Representation at the National Technical Advisory Committee

We have noticed that the local government units are not represented to the technical advisory committee. If we review the functions of the committee, the implementation of the program is primarily lodged to the local government unit. Hence, their presence in the committee is befitting and essential.

F. Lack of focal offices at Local level to focus on coastal greenbelt

The current law does not mandate local government unit to create an office that are specifically focus on environment or on natural resources. Some cities have limited manpower to focus on complying with the coastal greenbelt, moreover the environment as a whole. So, it is recommended which office or agency at the local level will be assigned to be the focal office for coastal greenbelt matters of the local government unit.

G. Local Appropriations and Mechanisms thereof

Even the responsibility of local government unit, budgetary, technical or otherwise, is to complement programs of the national government agencies, it is also recommended to include a clear and specific guideline on the roles of LGUs. Any program that is supported by local government unit entails budgetary requirements. Complementing programs on relocation sites with basic services, as we all know, is one of the perennial problems in our country specially the urban resettlement agenda in each locality.

H. Implementation of Rehabilitation, Reforestation and Afforestation

The national government shall ensure that the priority local government have technical capacity to do the implementation of rehabilitation, reforestation and afforestation. As much as

LGUs want to complement the program, majority of them have limited capacities. A provision of the bill must include the trainings and capacity development activities for LGUs.

I. Access to People Survival Fund

The policy, requirements and guidelines of accessing the People Survival Fund might be different from the requirements of the national greenbelt program. There is no assurance that proposals intended for greenbelt programs will be approved on time. Experience-wise, there is still limited information on how to access this fund and that only very few LGUs have trained to access it. So, this source is not a tangent source of funding for greenbelt programs.

Position

Believing that the advancement of local autonomy will be upheld on managing their own coastal resources, it is befitting to support this bill, provided those suggestions are considered and taken into consideration. We can also visit our commitment on sustainable development goals. Our prayer is to consider the aforementioned comments for the mutual benefits of our people and of our environment.