

Republic of the Philippines  
**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**  
Quezon City, Metro Manila



**SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS**  
First Regular Session

**HOUSE BILL NO. 5807**

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Introduced by **Rep. Jose Enrique S. Garcia III**

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**EXPLANATORY NOTE**

This bill seeks to declare the Balanga Wetland and Nature Park (BWNP) in Barangay Tortugas, City of Balanga, Province of Bataan as a special ecological tourism zone with a three-pronged goal of developing and promoting the area into a tourist destination, generating investments and creating job opportunities, and protecting the natural resources within the area including mangroves, other aquatic plant and numerous migratory and local birds.

The BWNP is regarded as one of the most important feature of the Balanga City landscape. It improves the environmental condition of the area by protecting and improving water quality, providing wildlife habitats, serving as a natural flood control, maintaining surface water flow during dry season, supporting the fishing industry, and ensuring biological productivity. The wetland also provides aesthetic value to the surrounding community by reducing bank erosion and filtering trash from the Manila Bay. It is an ideal "outdoor classroom and museum" that showcases the beauty of nature and teaches about the value of biodiversity.

Recreational activities including hiking, fishing, bird watching and photography are also regular occurrences in the wetland. The *Ibong Dayo* Festival is celebrated annually to highlight the migratory birds passing through the wetlands.

In response to the influx of tourists, the local government of the City of Balanga has constructed an information center and several view decks and lookouts that offer a magnificent view of the birds in flight with Mt. Samat as its backdrop. However, inadequate national support has kept the BWNP from reaching its true potential as a tourist destination. With the approval of this bill, the BWNP will finally get the assistance needed to propel it to become a truly world class ecotourism zone that is ecologically sustainable, responsible, participative, culturally sensitive, economically viable and ethically and socially equitable for the local community.

Support for this bill is earnestly sought.



**JOSE ENRIQUE S. GARCIA III**  
Representative  
2<sup>nd</sup> District, Province of Bataan

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**AN ACT**  
**DECLARING THE BALANGA WETLAND AND NATURE**  
**PARK, IN BARANGAY TORTUGAS, CITY OF BALANGA**  
**AS A RESPONSIBLE, COMMUNITY-BASED**  
**ECOTOURISM ZONE, AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS**  
**THEREFORE**

**SECTION 1.** *Creation.* - The Balanga Wetland and Nature Park (BWNP) in Barangay Tortugas, City of Balanga, Province of Bataan shall be declared as a responsible, community-based special eco-tourism zone.

**SECTION 2.** *Declaration of Policy.* - The State is mandated to promote a tourism industry that is ecologically sustainable, responsible, participative, culturally sensitive, economically viable, and equitable for the local community. Towards this end, the Balanga Wetland and Nature Park is hereby declared a special ecotourism zone. It shall be accorded priority development by the Department of Tourism (DOT)

and shall be subject to the rules and regulations governing the development of ecotourism zones.

**SECTION 3. Objectives.** - Pursuant to the above declaration of policy, the State shall endeavour to accomplish the following:

- (a) Develop and promote responsible, community-based ecological tourism as the core management strategy in the development of the BWNP;
- (b) Ensure the conservation of the biodiversity and the preservation of the said ecotourism park;
- (c) Develop tourism products and programs that will generate employment and livelihood for the local residents concerned, consistent with the preservation and maintenance of natural resources;
- (d) Guarantee that the financial and economic benefits of the tourism industry are equitably shared by, and distributed among the local residents concerned by giving preference and support to community and home-based tourism enterprises, such as, but not limited to, micro and small businesses including local inns, lodges and homestays, restaurants, food and fruit stands, and other similar tourism oriented industries and businesses;
- (e) Ensure that the quality of local tourism programs and activities are educational and enriching for tourists and visitors through the provision of orientation, educational and tour programs by local tour operators, non- government organizations (NGOs), the City of Balanga and the DOT; and
- (f) Guarantee that in the development and promotion of the local tourism industry, the LGU of the City of Balanga shall ensure that the needs of local residents for adequate water supply, food, energy and local construction materials are first secured and met.

**SECTION 4. *Definition of Terms.*** - As used in this Act:

- a) *Biodiversity Conservation* refers to the practice of preserving the variety of species and habitats, including inter alia, terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems, and the ecological complexes which they are a part of;
- b) *Community-Based Tourism* refers to a form of tourism where the local community and its residents have substantial control and involvement in the development and management of the local tourism industry and a greater portion of the economic gains remain within the community;
- c) *Ecotourism* refers to a form of sustainable tourism within a natural area where community participation, protection and management of natural resources, cultural and indigenous knowledge and practices, environmental education and ethics, as well as economic benefits are fostered and pursued for the enrichment of host communities and the satisfaction of visitors;
- d) *Homestay* refers to a system of tourist accommodation where a tourist stays with local residents and experiences the day-to-day life within the local community;
- e) *Responsible Ecotourism* refers to a form of sustainable tourism in which both the tourism sector and the tourists take responsibility in the protection, respect, and conservation of the natural environment and the local culture and ways of life, and where community participation as well as economic benefits are fostered and pursued for the well-being of the local people and visitors; and
- f) *Sustainable Tourism Development* refers to the management of resources in a manner that simultaneously meets the needs of tourists and host locality; protects the opportunities for the future; fulfils the economic and social needs of the district; and preserves natural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity and a system that supports and perpetuates life.

**SECTION 5. *Scope and Coverage.*** - This Act shall cover the boundaries of the 11-hectare mangrove forest or the Balanga Wetland and Nature Park at Barangay Tortugas, City of Balanga, Province of Bataan.

The technical boundaries shall be undertaken by the DENR and other agencies for the proper implementation of this Act.

**SECTION 6. *Tourism Development Plan.*** -The DOT, in coordination with the DENR, shall assist the City of Balanga in the formulation of the Tourism Development Plan for the Balanga Wetland and Nature Park that shall be complemented by a set of guidelines for a responsible, community-based ecotourism. The tourism development plan shall ensure the preservation of the eco-park and shall include the following components:

- a) Carrying capacity of the eco-park;
- b) Specific site assessment;
- c) Identification of strategic priorities;
- d) Product development for local income generation;
- e) Capacity-building for the local community to allow residents therein to ably manage economically viable and responsible, community-based ecotourism business enterprises;
- f) Support for the formulation of local production groups and networks, including the marketing and pricing of products; and
- g) Marketing strategies that reflect the natural, social and environmental integrity of the BWNP.

The process of developing the Tourism Development Plan for the BWNP shall be participatory, from the bottom up, with the framework to be provided by the DOT and DENR, in consultation with the Balanga Wetland Development Council herein created.

**SECTION 7.** *Formation of the Balanga Wetland and Nature Park Development Council.* - A multi-sectoral council to be known as the "Balanga Wetland Development Council" shall be created, whose members shall be co-terminous with the incumbent mayor of the City of Balanga. It shall be composed of the following members:

- a) The Mayor of the City of Balanga sitting as Chairperson;
- b) The head of the City Tourism Office, sitting as Vice-chairperson;
- c) The head of the City Environmental and Natural Resources Office;
- d) Three (3) representatives from the private sector

**SECTION 8.** *Functions and Responsibilities of the Council.* The council shall be responsible for the following:

- a) Formulation and the implementation of the Tourism Development Plan in consultation with the local residents, businesses, and other stakeholders;
- b) Assessment and evaluation of the potential impact of the development to the environmental safety and well-being of the site, communities, and enterprises;
- c) Provision of technical and financial assistance to the communities within the site;
- d) Formulation of the rules and regulations in relation to the maintenance and security of the ecotourism site; and
- e) Performance of other functions as may be necessary to carry out the objectives of this Act.

**SECTION 9.** *Formulation of Guidelines and Standards.* - The concerned Protected Area Management Board of the DENR, DOT and the Balanga Wetland Development Council, shall assist in the formulation of local tourism standards ensuring that environmental protection is integrated in the development of ecotourism plans.

The guidelines and standards shall:

- (a) Raise the capacity of all stakeholders and ensure that best practices are followed;

- (b) Ensure optimal use of water and energy;
- (c) Reduce waste and pollution through the encouragement of recycling and other environmentally-sound waste management reduction and disposal schemes;
- (d) Prevent vandalism in the facilities of the eco-park; and
- (e) Encourage the use of local produce and services, and support the employment of local people.

**SECTION 10.** *Coordination with National Agencies.* - The DOT shall closely coordinate with the government of the City of Balanga, as well as the relevant regional offices of the DENR, DOLE, DPWH, DOTr, DA, DepEd, DTI, DILG, the PNP, the MARINA, and other line agencies of the government in the implementation of this Act.

**SECTION 11.** *Implementing Rules and Regulations.* - The DOT, in coordination with the DENR, and in consultation with the City Government of Balanga, other concerned government agencies, and stakeholders, within thirty (30) days from the effectivity of this Act, shall promulgate the rules and regulations necessary for the effective implementation of the provisions of this Act.

**SECTION 12.** *Appropriations.* - The Secretary of Tourism shall include in the Department's subsidy program, support for the capital outlay requirements of the BWNP for the preliminary implementation of this Act and enhancement of the facilities of the ecotourism zone which shall be taken from the budget of the Department of Tourism for the current fiscal year.

The budgetary allocations for the succeeding years shall be included in the General Appropriations Act, subject to government audit.

**SECTION 13.** *Separability Clause.* - If, for any reason, any provision of this Act is declared unconstitutional or invalid, other provisions

hereof which are not affected thereby shall continue to be in full force and effect.

**SECTION 14. *Repealing Clause.*** - All laws, decrees, executive orders proclamation and administrative regulations, or parts thereof inconsistent herewith are hereby repealed or modified accordingly.

**SECTION 15. *Effectivity Clause.*** - This Act shall take effect immediately after its publication in at least two (2) national newspapers of general circulation or in the Official Gazette.

Approved.