



Republic of the Philippines
House of Representatives
Quezon City, Metro Manila

Twentieth Congress
First Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 2776



**Introduced by Representatives Ferdinand Martin G.
Romualdez, Andrew Julian K. Romualdez, Yedda Marie K.
Romualdez, and Jude A. Acidre**

EXPLANATORY NOTE

Peatlands are unique wetland ecosystems that provide critical environmental services, including carbon sequestration, water regulation, and biodiversity conservation. In the Philippines, the Leyte Sab-a Basin Peatland located in the municipality of Alang-alang and nearby areas in Leyte is one of only a few documented peatland ecosystems in the country. It covers an estimated 1,300 hectares of peat deposits, serving as an essential ecological buffer against climate change, flooding, and biodiversity loss.

Despite its ecological significance, the Leyte Sab-a Peatland continues to face threats from land conversion, agricultural encroachment, drainage, and peat extraction. These human-induced activities compromise not only the structural integrity of the ecosystem but also the surrounding communities' access to clean water, sustainable livelihoods, and protection from natural hazards.

Peatlands, when drained or burned, release large quantities of stored carbon into the atmosphere, contributing to greenhouse gas emissions. Protecting the Leyte Sab-a Peatland is therefore not only a matter of preserving local biodiversity and water resources it is also a critical climate action imperative in support of the Philippines'

commitments under the Paris Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals.

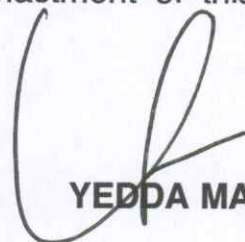
This bill seeks to declare the Leyte Sab-a Peatland as a critical peatland conservation area and to establish a comprehensive framework for its protection, sustainable management, and community-based stewardship. It mandates the formulation of a Leyte Sab-a Peatland Conservation and Management Plan, the creation of a multi-sectoral management council, and the allocation of funding for restoration, scientific research, ecotourism, and alternative livelihoods for communities.

Enacting this proposed measure affirms the State's duty under Article II, Section 16 of the 1987 Constitution to "protect and advance the right of the people to a balanced and healthful ecology in accord with the rhythm and harmony of nature." Moreover, it operationalizes the Philippine government's commitments under the Peatland Protection Strategy (2017–2027) of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), as well as international frameworks on wetland conservation.

This is one of the bills proposed during the first Eastern Visayas Young Leaders Parliament held on December 11-15, 2024. The passage of this measure will safeguard one of Eastern Visayas' last remaining peatland ecosystems for current and future generations. It is for these urgent reasons that the immediate enactment of this bill is earnestly sought.



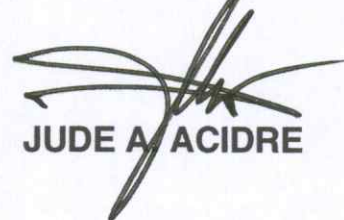
FERDINAND MARTIN G. ROMUALDEZ



YEDDA MARIE K. ROMUALDEZ



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JUDE A. ACIDRE



Republic of the Philippines
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Twentieth Congress
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HOUSE BILL NO. **2776**

Introduced by Representatives Ferdinand Martin G.
Romualdez, Andrew Julian K. Romualdez, Yedda Marie K.
Romualdez, and Jude A. Acidre

AN ACT
PROVIDING FOR THE PROTECTION, CONSERVATION,
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, AND MANAGEMENT OF THE
LEYTE SAB-A PEATLAND, CREATING FOR THE PURPOSE THE
LEYTE SAB-A PEATLAND COUNCIL, APPROPRIATING FUNDS
THEREFOR, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the
Philippines in Congress assembled:*

Section 1. Short Title. — This Act shall be known as the "**Leyte
Sab-a Peatland Conservation and Sustainable Development Act.**"

Section 2. Declaration of Policy. — It is the policy of the State to protect and conserve peatlands as critical ecosystems that contribute to biodiversity, water regulation, carbon storage, climate change mitigation, and disaster risk reduction. The State recognizes the ecological importance of the Leyte Sab-a Peatland, one of the last remaining and most biologically significant peatlands in the country. In accordance with Republic Act No. 7586 or the National Integrated Protected Areas System

(NIPAS) Act of 1992, as amended by RA 11038 or the Expanded NIPAS Act of 2018, the State shall adopt a participatory, science-based, and community-driven framework to ensure the long-term sustainability and resilience of this vital ecosystem.

Section 3. Definition of Terms. - For the purposes of this Act, the following terms are defined:

- a) *Peatland* – A type of wetland ecosystem with a thick waterlogged soil layer made up of dead and decaying plant material (peat), which acts as a significant carbon sink;
- b) *Leyte Sab-a Peatland* – Refers to the peat swamp forest ecosystem in the municipalities of Alang-alang, Jaro, Sta. Fe, and Pastrana, Leyte, known for its rich biodiversity and ecological significance.
- c) *Council* – Refers to the Leyte Sab-a Peatland Conservation and Development Council created under this Act.
- (d) *Sustainable Development* – Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Section 4. Leyte Sab-a Peatland as a Protected Area. - Pursuant to the provisions of Republic Act No. 7586, as amended by Republic Act No. 11038, otherwise known as the "Expanded National Integrated Protected Areas System Act of 2018, the Leyte Sab-a Peatland, located in the municipalities of Alang-alang, Sta. Fe, and San Miguel, Province of Leyte, is hereby declared a protected area under the category of protected landscape, to be known as the Leyte Sab-a Peatland Protected Landscape (LSPPL).

The boundaries and technical description of the protected area shall be delineated and verified by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) in coordination with the National Mapping and Resource Information Authority (NAMRIA), concerned local government units, and relevant stakeholders, within one (1) year from the effectivity of this Act. The final map and technical description shall be deposited in the archives of the DENR and published in the Official Gazette and a newspaper of general circulation.

Section 5. Creation of the Leyte Sab-a Peatland Conservation and Development Council - There is hereby created the **Leyte Sab-a Peatland Conservation and Development Council (LSPCDC)**, which shall serve as the primary planning, regulatory, and coordinating body for the protection, management, and sustainable development of the Leyte Sab-a Peatland.

The Council shall be attached to the **Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR)**, and shall be composed of the following:

- a) The Regional Executive Director of DENR Region VIII – **Chairperson**
- b) A representative from the Biodiversity Management Bureau (BMB) – **Co-Chairperson**
- c) The Governor of Leyte or their duly designated representative
- d) Congressional District Representative or their duly designated representative
- e) Mayors each from the local government units of Tacloban City, Alangalang, Jaro, Sta. Fe, San Miguel, and Pastrana, or their duly designated representative
- f) One (1) representative from the academe, to be nominated by state universities in Region VIII
- g) One (1) representative from a duly registered civil society or environmental non-government organization (NGO) operating within the peatland area
- h) One (1) indigenous peoples' representative, if applicable and residing within the peatland ecosystem
- i) One (1) representative from local peoples' organizations or community cooperatives duly registered with the government.

Section 5. Functions of the Council. - The Council shall have the following powers and functions:

- 1) Formulate and implement a comprehensive **Leyte Sab-a Peatland Conservation and Sustainable Management Plan**;
- 2) Develop guidelines for land-use, biodiversity protection, and climate-resilient development in the peatland;
- 3) Recommend and facilitate the declaration of the peatland as a protected area, or part thereof, under the NIPAS Act;

- 4) Mobilize technical and financial resources for peatland programs and projects;
- 5) Conduct periodic scientific assessments of peatland health and carbon sequestration;
- 6) Ensure multi-stakeholder participation, including consultation with affected communities, CSOs, and academic experts;
- 7) Submit an annual report to Congress on the status, threats, and interventions concerning the Leyte Sab-a Peatland.

Section 6. *Prohibited Acts and Penalties.* - The following acts shall be prohibited within the Leyte Sab-a Peatland and shall be penalized:

- 1) Dumping, burning, or disposal of solid waste or hazardous substances;
- 2) Illegal logging, peat extraction, or land conversion without Council approval
- 3) Drainage or deliberate drying of peatland areas;
- 4) Construction of infrastructure that impairs the hydrology or biodiversity of the peatland;
- 5) Poaching, collection, or trade of endemic and threatened species in the area.

Any person found violating this section shall be penalized with imprisonment of **six (6) months to six (6) years** and a fine of **not less than Five Hundred Thousand Pesos (P500,000.00)** but not more than **Two Million Pesos (P2,000,000.00)**, or both, without prejudice to prosecution under existing environmental laws.

Section 7. *Prohibition of Ownership and Conversion.* - No land conversion shall be allowed to take affect within the Leyte Sab-a Peatland. Any claim of land ownership over the property shall be declared null and void and shall be expropriated in favor of the government, subject to the expropriation proceedings provided for by law.

Section 8. *Appropriations* - The amount necessary for the initial implementation of this Act shall be charged against the current budget of the DENR and concerned national agencies. Thereafter, such sums as may be necessary for the continued implementation shall be included in the General Appropriations Act (GAA).

Section. 9. Implementing Rules and Regulations - Within ninety (90) days from the effectivity of this Act, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) shall, in coordination with Leyte Sab-a Peatland Conservation and Development Council, the Department of Agriculture (DA), Department of Science and Technology (DOST), Provincial Government of Leyte, and concerned Local Government Units (LGUs), and in consultation with relevant civil society organizations, academic institutions, and local communities, promulgate the necessary implementing rules and regulations (IRR) for the effective implementation of this Act.

Section. 10. Separability Clause - If any part, section, or provision of this Act is held unconstitutional or invalid, the other provisions not affected thereby shall remain in full force and effect.

Section 11. Repealing Clause - All laws, presidential decrees, executive orders, rules and regulations inconsistent with the provisions of this Act are hereby repealed or modified accordingly.

Section 12. Effectivity Clause. - This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in the Official Gazette or in at least two (2) newspapers of general circulation.

Approved,