

Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Constitution Hills, Quezon City

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 3534



Introduced by REP. FAUSTINO 'BOJIE' G. DY III

EXPLANATORY NOTE

This bill seeks to declare Barangay San Miguel in the Municipality of Echague, Province of Isabela as an ecotourism zone.

Tourism spurs economic growth, and in the Philippines, it is the ecotourism industry that grows the most rapidly. But that rapid growth, if left unchecked, could result in irreversible damage to local ecology and biodiversity, while adversely affecting people who rely on ecotourism for their livelihood. As such, to preserve the ecology, to help communities reliant on ecotourism, and to sustain tourism-driven economic growth, the State must craft measures to better manage ecotourism, ensuring ecotourism zones are managed in ways that are sustainable, pro-community, and pro-ecology. This bill is one such measure.

Barangay San Miguel is the remotest barangay of the Municipality of Echague. Located fifty kilometers away from the town proper, at the foot of the Sierra Madre Mountains, the Barangay hosts the *Dipaniong Cave Eco-Trail*, the *Dicalabbagin Falls Circuit*, and the *Ilaguen White Sand River*. The area boasts of high biodiversity, hosting endemic and endangered birds such as the Isabela Oriole and the Rufous Hornbill, locally known as the *Kalaw*.

As part of the Filipinos' rich natural heritage, the area warrants the protection of the law, a protection that this Act seeks to carry out in three ways: (1) declaring Barangay San Miguel into an ecotourism zone; (2) creating a Council that will ensure

the zone is developed sustainably; and (3) directing national agencies to prioritize the zone for sustainable development.

The bill garnered overwhelming support in the 19th Congress, highlighting that the tourism sector is vital to economic growth and employment generation. In view of the foregoing, the immediate passage of this measure in the 20th Congress is earnestly sought.



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AN ACT
DECLARING BARANGAY SAN MIGUEL IN THE MUNICIPALITY OF
ECHAGUE, PROVINCE OF ISABELA, AN ECOTOURISM ZONE, AND
APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR

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 “San Miguel Ecotourism Zone Act”.

SECTION 2. Barangay San Miguel as an Ecotourism Zone. – Barangay San Miguel in the Municipality of Echague, Province of Isabela, is hereby declared an ecotourism zone. As such, its development shall be prioritized by the Department of Tourism (DOT), subject to the rules and regulations governing the development of ecotourism zones.

SECTION 3. San Miguel Ecotourism Development Council. – The San Miguel Ecotourism Development Council, hereinafter referred to as the Council, is hereby created. It shall be composed of ten (10) members, as follows:

a) Ex-officio Members

- 1) DOT Regional Director for Region 2, as Chairperson;
- 2) Mayor of the Municipality of Echague, as Co-Chairperson;
- 3) Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Regional Director for Region 2, or a duly authorized representative;

- 4) Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) Regional Director for Region 2, or a duly authorized representative;
- 5) Punong Barangay of Barangay San Miguel, Echague;
- 6) Provincial Tourism Officer of the Province of Isabela;
- 7) Provincial Environment and Natural Resources Officer of the Province of Isabela

b) Members Who Shall Represent Sectoral Concerns

- 1) One (1) representative from an academic institution, preferably from a university or college in the Province of Isabela, with proven track record in or related to the conservation of forests and wildlife;
- 2) One (1) representative from the private sector, preferably a resident of the Province of Isabela, who is distinguished in a profession or field of interest relevant to the conservation of forests and wildlife or to ecotourism; and
- 3) One (1) representative from either non-government organization (NGO) or people's organization (PO), duly accredited both by the DENR and the municipal government of Echague. The NGO or PO represented should have been in existence for at least five (5) years with a track record in the conservation of forests and wildlife.

The ex-officio elective members of the Council shall serve for the duration of their respective terms of office to which they are elected. The ex officio appointive members of the Council shall serve for the duration of the period they hold the office to which they are appointed.

The sectoral members of the Council shall be selected by the Sangguniang Bayan of the Municipality of Echague in a fair and transparent manner. They shall each serve a term of three (3) years and may be reappointed for another term.

The members of the Council shall serve without compensation, but shall be authorized to actual and necessary travel and subsistence expenses incurred in the performance of their duties, either in their attendance in meetings of the Council or in connection with their official functions authorized by a resolution of the Council, subject to existing rules and regulations.

Each member shall have the full capacity and accountability for decisions binding to the member's sector.

A member of the Council may be removed for any of the following grounds:

- a. more than three (3) consecutive unexcused absences from regular meetings of the Council;

- b. commission of acts prejudicial to the development and management of the ecotourism zone;
- c. disassociation from the office or organization being represented;
- d. termination of relationship with the office or organization being represented; or
- e. conviction by final judgment of any criminal act.

The local government of the Municipality of Echague shall provide a Secretariat for the Council, to be headed by the Municipal Tourism Officer, and provide funds to defray the expenses of the Secretariat in line with the performance of its official functions and the conduct of the Council's activities. The DOT and the DENR shall assist the Council in carrying out the objectives of this Act.

SECTION 4. Functions and Responsibilities of the Council. – The Council shall have the following functions and responsibilities

- a. Formulate and implement an ecotourism development and management plan in consultation with the local residents, businesses, and other stakeholders;
- b. Assess and evaluate the potential impact of development plans and activities to the environmental safety and well-being of the zone, communities, and enterprises;
- c. Provide technical and financial assistance to the communities within and
- d. surrounding the ecotourism zone;
- e. Formulate rules and regulations in relation to the maintenance and security of the ecotourism zone; and
- f. Perform other functions as may be necessary to carry out the objectives of this Act.

SECTION 5. Formulation of Standards and Guidelines. – The DOT and the DENR shall assist the Council in the formulation of local ecotourism standards and recommend guidelines to ensure that biodiversity conservation and environmental protection are integrated in the development and management of the ecotourism zone.

The standards and guidelines shall:

- a. Raise the capacity of all stakeholders and ensure that best ecotourism practices are adopted;
- b. Ensure optimal use of water and energy;
- c. Encourage recycling and environmentally-sound waste management reduction and disposal schemes;
- d. Encourage the use of local produce and services, and support the employment of local people; and
- e. Prevent vandalism in the ecotourism zone.

SECTION 6. Coordination with National Agencies. – The DOT and the DENR shall closely coordinate with the Council, as well as with the regional and provincial offices

of the DPWH, Department of Labor and Employment, Department of Transportation, Department of Agriculture, Department of Education, Department of Trade and Industry, Department of the Interior and Local Government, Philippine National Police and other concerned agencies of the government in the implementation of this Act.

SECTION 7. Appropriations. – The Secretaries of the DOT and DENR shall include in their respective Department's program the implementation of this Act, the funding of which shall be included in the annual General Appropriations Act, and shall augment such allocation with internally generated funds of the DOT.

SECTION 8. Implementing Rules and Regulations. – Within thirty (30) days from the effectivity of this Act, the DOT and DENR shall, in consultation with the Council and concerned government agencies and stakeholders, promulgate the necessary rules and regulations for the proper implementation of this Act.

SECTION 9. Separability Clause. – If any provision of this Act shall be declared unconstitutional or invalid, the other provisions not affected thereby shall remain to be in full force and effect.

SECTION 10. Repealing Clause. – All laws, rules, regulations, executive orders, proclamations, presidential decrees and other issuances inconsistent with any provision of this Act are hereby repealed or amended accordingly.

SECTION 11. Effectivity. – This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in the Official Gazette or in a newspaper of general circulation.

Approved,