



Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City

20th CONGRESS
1st Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 9098



Introduced by **REPRESENTATIVE JENNIFER A. LAGBAS**

EXPLANATORY NOTE

Marine turtles are among the world's most ancient and ecologically significant species, yet they remain extremely vulnerable to habitat loss, pollution, illegal harvesting, and the adverse impacts of coastal development. The Hawksbill Sea Turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricata*), in particular, is classified as critically endangered by both the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) through DAO 2019-09 and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Its survival depends heavily on the protection of its remaining nesting sites and coastal habitats.

The Municipality of Magsaysay, Misamis Oriental is one of the few areas in the Philippines where Hawksbill turtles continue to nest and forage. According to the Hawksbill Turtle Critical Habitat Management Plan, multiple coastal barangays, including Kandiis, San Isidro, and Damayuhan, host long-established nesting grounds, prompting the DENR to formally designate portions of the municipality as a Critical Habitat for the Hawksbill Turtle through Administrative Order No. 2016-02. The critical habitat covers more than 612 hectares of biologically important coastal areas essential to the species' reproduction and long-term viability.

Over the years, Magsaysay has demonstrated exceptional commitment to marine turtle conservation. Local government units, together with DENR, Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR), non-government organizations, academic institutions such as the Xavier University McKeough Marine Center, and community volunteers, have sustained long-standing initiatives to protect and monitor Hawksbill nesting sites. These include the creation and continued operations of the Pawikan Task Force, regular community awareness programs, research collaborations, and the implementation of protective measures identified in the Critical Habitat Management Plan.

Despite these efforts, the Hawksbill Turtle remains under constant threat from illegal hunting, coastal pollution, destructive fishing practices, and human encroachment, factors that have contributed to population decline and the destruction of marine habitats nationwide. The State must therefore strengthen and institutionalize conservation programs, support local initiatives, and recognize communities that serve as models of biodiversity protection.

Declaring the Municipality of Magsaysay as the Hawksbill Turtle Capital of the Philippines will highlight its national ecological importance, strengthen the legal and institutional framework for conserving critically endangered marine species, and promote responsible ecotourism and environmental stewardship. This recognition will also encourage greater government support, scientific research, and collaborative protection efforts, benefitting not only Magsaysay but the entire country's marine biodiversity.

In view of the above, passage of this bill is earnestly sought.



HON. JENNIFER A. LAGBAS
Representative
First District, Misamis Oriental



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AN ACT
DECLARING THE MUNICIPALITY OF MAGSAYSAY, PROVINCE OF MISAMIS
ORIENTAL AS THE HAWKSBILL TURTLE CAPITAL OF THE PHILIPPINES

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

SECTION 1. *Declaration of Policy.* - It is hereby declared the policy of the State to protect, conserve, and sustainably manage the country's marine wildlife resources, including critically endangered species such as the Hawksbill Sea Turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricata*), consistent with Republic Acts No. 7586 and 11038 (Expanded NIPAS Act), and Republic Act No. 9147 (The Wildlife Resources Conservation and Protection Act).

The State recognizes the ecological, scientific, climate resilience, food security, and sustainable tourism value of marine turtle habitats and shall promote conservation, restoration of marine ecosystems, sustainable fisheries management, community participation, and responsible tourism.

SEC. 2. *Municipality of Magsaysay as the Hawksbill Turtle Capital of the Philippines.* - In recognition of the municipality's unique ecological significance, the Municipality of Magsaysay, Province of Misamis Oriental, is hereby declared as the Hawksbill Turtle Capital of the Philippines.

SEC. 3. *Establishment of the Magsaysay Hawksbill Turtle Conservation and Ecotourism Program.* - There is hereby established a program integrating wildlife conservation, marine ecosystem restoration, scientific research, environmental education, sustainable tourism, and community livelihood development, including:

- (a) Hawksbill Turtle Rescue, Rehabilitation and Conservation Facility;

- (b) Hawksbill Turtle Hatchery and Nesting Protection Program
- (c) Marine Turtle Conservation Museum and Education Center;
- (d) Program Management and Operations Office; and
- (e) Science-based Habitat and Species Monitoring.

SEC. 4. *Sustainable Marine Tourism Programs.* - The Department of Tourism (DOT), the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), and the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) shall establish:

- (a) Sustainable Diving Program;
- (b) Monitored Turtle Release Program; and
- (c) Marine Turtle Conservation Voluntourism Program.

SEC. 5. *Support for Conservation Programs.* - The concerned national government agencies, including the DENR, BFAR, DOT, and Department of Science and Technology (DOST), in coordination with the LGU of Magsaysay, shall provide technical, logistical, and financial support to strengthen conservation programs, scientific research, restoration and rehabilitation, community capacity-building, ecotourism development aligned with environmental safeguards, and the enforcement of wildlife protection laws within the municipality.

SECTION 6. *Declaration of Marine Sanctuaries.* - Identified Hawksbill turtle nesting sites, feeding grounds, migratory corridors, coral reef habitats, and seagrass beds within municipal waters shall be declared and managed as Marine Sanctuaries subject to scientific assessment by DENR and BFAR.

These sanctuaries shall be managed according to national standards and supported by habitat restoration programs, including:

- (a) Coral Reef Rehabilitation;
- (b) Seagrass Restoration;
- (c) Blue-carbon Conservation; and
- (d) Sustainable Fisheries and Coastal Resource Management Programs.

SEC. 7. *Monitoring, Data Management, and Reporting.* - DENR and BFAR shall establish standardized monitoring methods, biological and ecological data collection systems, and regular reporting mechanisms aligned with national marine turtle databases.

SEC. 8. *Marine Conservation Education Integration.* - In coordination with the Department of Education and Commission on Higher Education, marine turtle conservation and marine biodiversity protection shall be integrated into local education curricula, research, and training programs.

SEC. 9. *Appropriations.* - The Secretary of the DENR shall immediately include in the Department's program the implementation of this Act, the funding of which shall be included in the annual General Appropriations Act.

SEC. 10. Implementing Rules and Regulations. - Within ninety (90) days from the effectivity of this Act, the DENR, in coordination with BFAR, DOT, and the local government unit of Magsaysay, shall promulgate the necessary rules and regulations.

SEC. 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,