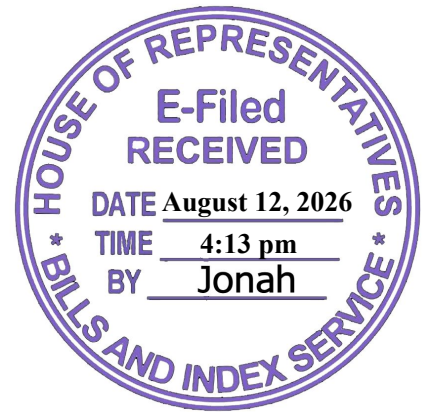


Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City, Metro Manila

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
Second Regular Session

House Bill No. **10754**



Introduced by Honorable Ma. Alana Samanta Taliño Santos

AN ACT INSTITUTIONALIZING THE TEACHING OF THE WEST PHILIPPINE SEA, THE 2016 SOUTH CHINA SEA ARBITRAL AWARD, AND THE PHILIPPINES' MARITIME RIGHTS AND ENTITLEMENTS AS PART OF THE PHILIPPINE HISTORY CURRICULUM IN BASIC EDUCATION

EXPLANATORY NOTE

In 2026, the Philippines commemorates the tenth anniversary of the landmark 2016 South China Sea Arbitral Award, a historic legal victory that reaffirmed the country's maritime rights under the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). The Award clarified the legal status of maritime features in the South China Sea and declared that China's expansive "nine-dash line" claim has no legal basis under international law. It is a defining milestone in the pursuit of a rules-based international order, providing a final and legally binding resolution to disputes over maritime entitlements.

As emphasized by the National Maritime Council (NMC), the 2016 Arbitral Award remains the Philippines' strongest legal foundation for defending its rights in the West Philippine Sea. The Council described the Award as "not merely a legal victory" but "a beacon that guides our national policy and collective action in protecting our maritime rights and ensuring that the West Philippine Sea remains a source of peace, stability, and prosperity for present and future generations of Filipinos." The Council likewise stressed that the Award is final and legally binding between the Philippines and China and continues to guide the country's maritime policy and diplomacy while promoting the peaceful settlement of disputes.¹

Beyond its legal significance, the West Philippine Sea is an integral part of the nation's history, identity, security, and economic future. It sustains the livelihoods of Filipino fisherfolk, serves as a vital maritime corridor for trade and commerce, and contains valuable marine and natural resources essential to national development. As such, every Filipino should possess a clear understanding of the historical, legal, and geopolitical issues surrounding the West Philippine Sea. Recent government efforts have shown that increasing public awareness, especially among the youth, helps foster a better understanding of the

¹ Esguerra, D. J. (2026, July 12). *10 years on, PH arbitral win remains anchor for WPS rights*. Philippine News Agency. <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1279257>

country's maritime rights and national interests. This highlights the importance of introducing these topics in the basic education curriculum.²

Recognizing that an informed citizenry is essential to safeguarding the country's maritime rights, the present administration launched a transparency initiative to systematically document and publicize developments and unlawful activities in the West Philippine Sea. By exposing coercive actions at sea and grounding the Philippines' position in international law, the initiative has strengthened public awareness, reinforced domestic support, and garnered greater international solidarity behind the country's rules-based position.³

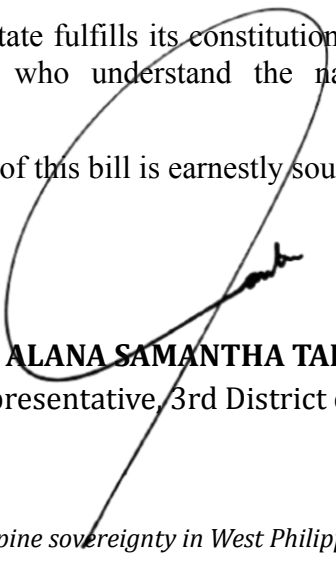
While the transparency initiative keeps the public informed of current developments, public awareness must be sustained through formal education. Institutionalizing the study of the West Philippine Sea and the 2016 South China Sea Arbitral Award in the Philippine History curriculum ensures that Filipino students acquire, as early as primary and secondary education, a factual and evidence-based understanding of the country's maritime history, legal rights, and national interests. In this way, the measure transforms public awareness into enduring civic education and equips future generations to appreciate and uphold the Philippines' sovereignty, sovereign rights, and maritime entitlements through peaceful and lawful means.

Despite its significance, discussions on the West Philippine Sea and the 2016 Arbitral Award remain limited in the basic education curriculum. There is therefore a compelling need to institutionalize the teaching of these subjects to ensure that future generations are equipped with knowledge grounded in Philippine history, the Constitution, and international law.

This measure seeks to integrate the study of the West Philippine Sea, the 2016 South China Sea Arbitral Award, and the Philippines' maritime rights and entitlements into the Philippine History curriculum in primary and secondary education. This bill seeks to ensure that every Filipino student understands the substance of this victory. It aims to cultivate historical awareness, civic consciousness, patriotism, and respect for the rule of law while encouraging students to appreciate the importance of safeguarding the country's sovereignty, sovereign rights, and maritime interests through peaceful and lawful means.

By educating the youth on these matters, the State fulfills its constitutional duty to develop informed, patriotic, and responsible citizens who understand the nation's rights and responsibilities in the international community.

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



HON. MA. ALANA SAMANTHA TALIÑO SANTOS
Representative, 3rd District of Cotabato

² Javier, M. J. F. (2025, March 12). *Youths embrace Philippine sovereignty in West Philippine Sea*. Philippine Information Agency.

<https://pia.gov.ph/news/youths-embrace-philippine-sovereignty-in-west-philippine-sea/>

³ Ibarra, E. J. A., & Arugay, A. A. (2024, May 6). *Something old, something new: The Philippines' transparency initiative in the South China Sea*. FULCRUM.

<https://fulcrum.sg/something-old-something-new-the-philippines-transparency-initiative-in-the-south-china-sea/>

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AN ACT INSTITUTIONALIZING THE TEACHING OF THE WEST PHILIPPINE SEA, THE 2016 SOUTH CHINA SEA ARBITRAL AWARD, AND THE PHILIPPINES' MARITIME RIGHTS AND ENTITLEMENTS AS PART OF THE PHILIPPINE HISTORY CURRICULUM IN BASIC EDUCATION, AND 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 “West Philippine Sea and Maritime Rights Education Act.”

SECTION 2. Declaration of State Policy. It is the policy of the State to uphold its national sovereignty, territorial integrity, and national interest in the pursuit of an independent foreign policy, as mandated by the Constitution.

Consistent with the State’s duty to inculcate patriotism and nationalism in the youth, the State recognizes that formal education is a vital tool in developing citizens who are informed and protective of the nation's patrimony and maritime wealth.

The State adheres to the generally accepted principles of international law and the policy of peace and cooperation with all nations.

Toward this end, the State shall institutionalize an evidence-based and constitutionally grounded curriculum regarding the West Philippine Sea and the 2016 South China Sea Arbitral Award to ensure that the defense of our maritime rights remains rooted in the rule of law and national unity

SECTION 3. Inclusion in the Philippine History Curriculum. — The Department of Education (DepEd) shall integrate the study of the West Philippine Sea, the 2016 South China Sea Arbitral Award, and the Philippines' maritime rights and entitlements into the Philippine History curriculum in all primary and secondary educational institutions, both public and private, consistent with the national curriculum and existing educational standards.

SECTION 4. Definition of Terms. — For purposes of this Act, the following terms shall be defined as follows:

- (a) **2016 Arbitral Award.** refers to the Award on Jurisdiction and Admissibility and the Final Award issued by the Arbitral Tribunal constituted under Annex VII to the 1982 UNCLOS in the matter of PCA Case N^o. 2013-19;

- (b) **Maritime Features.** refers to the classification of geographical features as islands, rocks, or low-tide elevations, which determines their capacity to generate a Territorial Sea, EEZ, or Continental Shelf under Articles 13 and 121 of UNCLOS;
- (c) **West Philippine Sea.** refers to the maritime zones on the western side of the Philippine archipelago, including the Luzon Sea and the territorial seas of Bajo de Masinloc and the features of the Kalayaan Island Group, as defined in Republic Act No. 12064, otherwise known as the “Philippine Maritime Zones Act.”

SECTION 5. Objectives. — In implementing this Act, the DepEd shall be guided by the following objectives:

- (a) To foster among Filipino learners a deeper understanding of the historical, legal, economic, and geopolitical significance of the West Philippine Sea to the Philippines;
- (b) To educate students on the 2016 South China Sea Arbitral Award and its significance in affirming the Philippines’ maritime rights and entitlements under international law, particularly the UNCLOS;
- (c) To strengthen appreciation for the Philippines’ sovereign rights and jurisdiction over its maritime wealth, consistent with the Constitution and applicable international law;
- (d) To cultivate informed, responsible, and patriotic citizens who are equipped with a critical understanding of issues affecting the country’s territorial integrity, national security, and maritime interests;
- (e) To promote respect for the rule of law, the peaceful settlement of disputes through international law and third-party adjudication, and adherence to international legal principles in addressing maritime issues; and
- (f) To encourage historical awareness, civic consciousness, and national unity grounded in the factual and final nature of the 2016 Award.

SEC. 3. Implementing Rules and Development of Instructional Materials. — Within sixty (60) days from the effectivity of this Act, the Department shall, in consultation with the National Historical Commission of the Philippines (NHCP), the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), the National Maritime Council (NMC), the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG), maritime law experts, historians, educators, and other relevant stakeholders, promulgate the necessary rules and regulations for the effective implementation of this Act.

The Department shall likewise develop, review, and periodically update textbooks, teaching guides, digital resources, and other instructional materials to ensure that the subject matter is accurate, evidence-based, and consistent with the Constitution, Philippine laws, and the country’s international legal commitments.

SECTION 6. Core Curriculum Content. — The curriculum shall be grounded on factual and legal bases, including the 1987 Constitution, Republic Act No. 12065 or the Philippine Maritime Zones Act and the Philippine Archipelagic Sea Lanes Act, applicable Philippine laws and legislation, decisions and jurisprudence of the Supreme Court of the Philippines, the 2016 South China Sea Arbitral Award, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), other applicable rules and principles of international law, and authoritative and internationally recognized scholarly sources, journals, and publications.

Further, the integration of these topics into the Philippine History curriculum shall include, as appropriate, the following substantive findings and determinations of the 2016 Arbitral Award:

- (a) The legal status of the “nine-dash line” and the primacy of UNCLOS, including the determination that claims of “historic rights” beyond the maritime entitlements recognized under UNCLOS have no legal effect;
- (b) The characterization of Scarborough Shoal (Bajo de Masinloc/Panatag Shoal) as a rock under Article 121(3) of UNCLOS, which is entitled to a 12-nautical-mile territorial sea but does not generate an exclusive economic zone or continental shelf;
- (c) The status of Mischief Reef (Panganiban Reef), Second Thomas Shoal (Ayungin Shoal), and Subi Reef as low-tide elevations that do not, in their natural condition, generate maritime zones of their own;
- (d) The determination that Mischief Reef and Second Thomas Shoal are located within the exclusive economic zone and continental shelf of the Philippines;
- (e) The protection and preservation of the marine environment, including the obligations of States under Articles 192 and 194 of UNCLOS to protect and preserve the marine environment and to prevent, reduce, and control marine pollution, including from activities such as destructive fishing practices and harmful land reclamation;
- (f) The recognition of traditional fishing rights and the importance of protecting the safety, livelihood, and welfare of Filipino fisherfolk; and
- (g) Other relevant findings, determinations, principles, and legal conclusions of the 2016 Arbitral Award, as well as subsequent developments in international law and Philippine jurisprudence concerning the Philippines' maritime rights and entitlements.

SECTION 7.. Implementing Rules and Development of Instructional Materials. — Within sixty (60) days from the effectivity of this Act, the DepEd, in consultation with the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), the National Maritime Council (NMC), the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG), maritime law experts, educators, and other relevant government agencies and non-government organizations, shall promulgate the necessary rules and regulations for the effective implementation of this Act.

The DepEd shall develop, adopt, and periodically update appropriate textbooks, learning modules, teaching guides, digital resources, maps, trainings, and other instructional materials to ensure that the teaching of the West Philippine Sea, the 2016 South China Sea Arbitral Award, and the Philippines' maritime rights and entitlements is accurate, objective, evidence-based, and consistent with Philippine law and applicable principles of international law.

Such instructional materials shall accurately reflect the official Philippine names and internationally recognized names of relevant geographic and maritime features, as applicable and consistent with authoritative sources, including, among others, Reed Bank (Recto Bank), Fiery Cross Reef (Kagitingan Reef), and Johnson Reef (Mabini Reef). The DepEd shall likewise ensure that maps and other visual materials accurately depict the location, geographic character, and applicable maritime entitlements of relevant features in accordance with the 2016 Arbitral Award and other authoritative sources.

SECTION 8. Appropriations. — The amount necessary for the initial implementation of this Act shall be charged against the current year's appropriations of the DepEd.

Thereafter, such sums as may be necessary for its continued implementation shall be included in the annual General Appropriations Act (GAA).

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

SECTION 10. Repealing Clause. — All laws, decrees, executive orders, rules and regulations, and other issuances, or parts thereof, inconsistent with the provisions of this Act are hereby repealed, amended, or modified 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.