



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

H. No. 8575

BY REPRESENTATIVES PLAZA, BASCUG, MADRONA, CHAN (J.), SALVAME, ANGARA, ALVAREZ (J.), KHO (E.), TUAN, MIRAFLORES, HORIBATA, YAP (J.G.), AGYAO, ALANO, DALOG, MOMO, SINGSON (R.V.), CALDERON, YNARES, CORVERA, REGENCIA, CASTRO, GONZALES (A.M.), TUPAS, PLEYTO, BANCORO, RODRIGUEZ (E.), BELTRAN, DAZA, DEL MAR, GUINTU, BARBA, CAGAS, CAYTON, COLLANTES, ROMAN, ROQUE, UMALI, SUAN AND ATAYDE

AN ACT

DECLARING THE AGUSAN MARSH, LOCATED IN THE MUNICIPALITIES OF TALACOGON, SAN FRANCISCO, ROSARIO, BUNAWAN, LORETO, LA PAZ, AND VERUELA, ALL IN THE PROVINCE OF AGUSAN DEL SUR, AS AN ECOTOURISM ZONE

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

1 **SECTION 1.** *Declaration of Policy.* – The State is mandated to promote a tourism
2 industry that is ecologically sustainable, responsible, participative, culturally sensitive,
3 economically viable, and equitably beneficial to local communities.

4 **SEC. 2.** *Agusan Marsh Ecotourism Zone.* – The Agusan Marsh, located in the
5 Municipalities of Talacogon, San Francisco, Rosario, Bunawan, Loreto, La Paz, and Veruela
6 in the Province of Agusan del Sur is hereby declared an ecotourism zone. Pursuant thereto, its
7 development shall be prioritized and supported by the Department of Tourism (DOT), subject
8 to the rules and regulations governing the development of ecotourism zones.

1 **SEC. 3. *Scope and Coverage.*** – This Act shall cover the Municipalities of Talacogon,
2 San Francisco, Rosario, Bunawan, Loreto, La Paz, and Veruela.

3 The setting of technical boundaries of the ecotourism zone shall be undertaken by
4 the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and other concerned
5 agencies of the government.

6 **SEC. 4. *Definition of Terms.*** – As used in this Act:

7 (a) *Biodiversity conservation* refers to the practice of preserving the variety of
8 species, habitats and ecosystems, and genetic diversity of the place, including
9 *inter alia*, terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems, and the ecological
10 complexes which they are a part of;

11 (b) *Community-based tourism* refers to a form of tourism where the local
12 community and its residents have substantial control over and involvement in
13 the development and management of the local tourism industry wherein the
14 greater portion of the economic gains remain within the community;

15 (c) *Ecotourism* refers to a form of sustainable tourism within a natural area where
16 community participation, protection and management of natural resources,
17 cultural and indigenous knowledge and practices, environmental education and
18 ethics, as well as economic benefits, are fostered and pursued for the enrichment
19 of host communities and satisfaction of visitors;

20 (d) *Homestays* refers to a system of tourist accommodation where a tourist stays
21 with local residents and experiences the day-to-day life of the local residents;
22 and

23 (e) *Responsible ecotourism* refers to a form of sustainable tourism in which both
24 the tourism sector and the tourists take responsibility in the protection, respect,
25 and conservation of the natural environment and the local culture and ways of

1 life, and where community participation as well as economic benefits are
2 fostered and pursued for the well-being of the local residents and visitors.

3 **SEC. 5. *Development Strategies.*** – To accomplish the development of the Agusan
4 Marsh as an ecotourism zone, the State shall:

- 5 (a) Develop and promote responsible community-based ecotourism as the core
6 management strategy in the development of the ecotourism zone;
- 7 (b) Ensure the conservation of the biodiversity and the preservation of said
8 ecotourism zone;
- 9 (c) Develop tourism products and programs that shall generate employment and
10 livelihood for the local residents concerned, consistent with the preservation and
11 maintenance of the natural resources;
- 12 (d) Guarantee that the financial and economic benefits of the tourism industry are
13 equitably shared by and distributed among the local residents concerned, by
14 giving preference and support to community- and home-based micro and small
15 tourism enterprises, such as homestays, restaurants, food and fruit stands, and
16 other similar tourism-oriented businesses and activities;
- 17 (e) Ensure that the quality of local tourism programs and activities are educational
18 and enriching for tourists and visitors through the provision of orientation,
19 educational and tour programs by local tour operators, non-government
20 organizations (NGOs), concerned local government units (LGUs), DOT, and
21 DENR; and
- 22 (f) Guarantee that in the development and promotion of the local tourism industry,
23 the concerned LGUs shall ensure the adequate provision of water supply, food,
24 energy, and transportation for the needs of the local residents and communities.

1 **SEC. 6.** *The Agusan Marsh Ecotourism Development and Management Plan.* –

2 Within one hundred twenty (120) days after the approval of this Act, the Municipal
3 Governments of Talacogon, San Francisco, Rosario, Bunawan, Loreto, La Paz, and Veruela
4 shall, in coordination with the DOT, DENR, and concerned agencies of the government,
5 prepare the Agusan Marsh Ecotourism Development and Management Plan that shall be
6 complemented by a set of guidelines for responsible community-based ecotourism.

7 The Agusan Marsh Ecotourism Development and Management Plan shall ensure
8 the preservation of the ecotourism zone and shall include the following components:

- 9 (a) Carrying capacity of the ecotourism zone, including its endemic and migratory
10 bird species;
- 11 (b) Specific site assessment;
- 12 (c) Identification of strategic priorities;
- 13 (d) Product development plans for local income generation;
- 14 (e) Capacity-building for the local communities so residents therein can ably manage
15 economically viable and responsible community-based ecotourism business
16 enterprises;
- 17 (f) Strategies to promote the formulation of local production groups and networks,
18 including the marketing and pricing of products; and
- 19 (g) Marketing strategies that uphold the natural, social, and environmental integrity of
20 the ecotourism zone and its local residents.

21 **SEC. 7.** *Agusan Marsh Ecotourism Board.* – The Agusan Marsh Ecotourism
22 Board, hereinafter referred to as the Board, is hereby created. It shall be composed of the
23 following members:

- 24 (a) Governor of the Province of Agusan del Sur, as Chairperson;
- 25 (b) Secretary of the DOT, or a duly authorized representative;

- (c) Secretary of the DENR, or a duly authorized representative;
- (d) Mayors of the Municipalities of Talacogon, San Francisco, Rosario, Bunawan, Loreto, La Paz, and Veruela;
- (e) Representative from a non-governmental organization whose advocacy is environmental preservation;
- (f) Representative from the academe;
- (g) Representative from the business sector; and
- (h) Representative from the private sector.

The Board shall, in coordination with the DOT and concerned agencies of the government, promulgate the rules and regulations to implement this Act and, as the need arises, shall amend, modify, or revise such rules and regulations to meet the needs of changing times.

The Provincial Government of Agusan del Sur shall provide a secretariat for the Board including the funding necessary to cover the expenses for the performance of its functions and activities.

SEC. 8. *Role of the DOT.* – The DOT shall assist the Municipal Governments of Talacogon, San Francisco, Rosario, Bunawan, Loreto, La Paz, and Veruela in the implementation of the Agusan Marsh Ecotourism Development and Management Plan by providing technical assistance in tourism capacity building. It shall also include the Agusan Marsh in its national and regional promotion programs.

SEC. 9. *Appropriations.* – The funding for the implementation of this Act shall be included in the respective annual budgets of the Municipal Governments of Talacogon, San Francisco, Rosario, Bunawan, Loreto, La Paz, and Veruela. The DOT may augment such allocation with internally generated funds.

1 **SEC. 10. *Separability Clause.*** – If any provision or part of this Act shall be declared
2 unconstitutional or invalid, the other provisions not affected thereby shall remain in full force
3 and effect.

4 **SEC. 11. *Repealing Clause.*** – All laws, rules, regulations, executive orders,
5 presidential decrees, or other issuances contrary to or inconsistent with any of the provisions
6 of this Act are hereby deemed repealed or amended accordingly.

7 **SEC. 12. *Effectivity.*** – This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication
8 in the *Official Gazette* or in a newspaper of general circulation.

Approved,