



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

H. No. 8956

BY REPRESENTATIVES PLAZA, ARAGONES, BASCUG, UY (J.), VIOLAGO, GATO, CABREDO, CELESTE
AND SAULOG, PER COMMITTEE REPORT NO. 831

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, AN ECOTOURISM
ZONE, AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR**

*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.

7 **Sec. 3. Scope and Coverage.** - This Act shall cover the Municipalities of Talacogon,
8 San Francisco, Rosario, Bunawan, Loreto, La Paz and Veruela.

9 The setting of the technical boundaries of the Agusan Marsh Ecotourism Zone shall
10 be undertaken by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and other

1 concerned agencies.

2 **Sec. 4. *Definition of Terms.*** - As used in this Act:

3 a. *Biodiversity conservation* refers to the practice of preserving the variety of
4 species, habits and ecosystems, and genetic diversity of the place, including *inter*
5 *alia*, terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems, and the ecological
6 complexes which they are a part of;

7 b. *Community-based tourism* refers to a form of tourism where the local community
8 and its residents have substantial control over and involvement in the development
9 and management of the local tourism industry and a greater portion of the
10 economic gains remain within the community;

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

16 d. *Homestay* refers to a mode of tourist accommodation where a tourist stays in a
17 private home and experiences the day-to-day life of the local residents; and

18 e. *Responsible ecotourism* refers to a form of sustainable tourism in which both the
19 tourism sector and the tourists take responsibility in the protection and
20 conservation of the natural environment and the local culture and ways of life, and
21 where community participation in ecotourism as well as the economic benefits
22 that may be derived therefrom are fostered and pursued for the enjoyment and
23 well-being of local residents and visitors alike.

24 **Sec. 5. *Development Strategies.*** - To accomplish the development of the Agusan
25 Marsh Ecotourism Zone, the State shall:

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

21 **Sec. 6. *The Agusan Marsh Ecotourism Development and Management Plan.*** – Within
22 one hundred and twenty (120) days after the approval of this Act, the DOT, in coordination
23 with the DENR, shall formulate the Agusan Marsh Ecotourism Development and
24 Management Plan that shall be complemented by a set of guidelines for a responsible,
25 community-based tourism.

1 The Ecotourism Development and Management Plan shall ensure the preservation of
2 the ecotourism zone. It shall include and pay due regard to the following considerations:

3 a. Carrying capacity of the Agusan Marsh Ecotourism Zone, including its endemic and
4 migratory birds species;

5 b. Specific site assessment;

6 c. Identification of strategic priorities;

7 d. Product development plans for local income generation;

8 e. Capacity-building for the local community so residents therein can ably manage
9 economically viable and responsible, community- based ecotourism business
10 enterprises;

11 f. Strategies to promote the formulation of local production groups and networks,
12 including the marketing and pricing of products; and

13 g. Marketing strategies that uphold the natural, social and environmental integrity of
14 the Agusan Marsh Ecotourism Zone and its local residents.

15 The process of formulating the Agusan Marsh Ecotourism Development and
16 Management Plan shall be participatory, with the framework to be provided by the DOT and
17 the DENR, in consultation with the municipal governments of Talacogon, San Francisco,
18 Rosario, Bunawan, Loreto, La Paz and Veruela.

19 **Sec. 7. Agusan Marsh Ecotourism Board.** – The Agusan Marsh Ecotourism Board,
20 hereinafter referred to as the Board, is hereby created. It shall be composed of the following:

21 a. Governor of the Province of Agusan del Sur, as Chairperson;

22 b. Secretary of the DOT, or a duly authorized representative;

23 c. Secretary of the DENR, or a duly authorized representative;

24 d. Mayors of the Municipalities of Talacogon, San Francisco, Rosario, Bunawan,
25 Loreto, La Paz and Veruela;

- 1 e. Representative from a non-government organization whose advocacy is
2 environmental preservation;
- 3 f. Representative from the academe;
- 4 g. Representative from the business sector; and
- 5 h. Representative from the private sector.

6 The Board shall promulgate the necessary rules and regulations for the proper
7 implementation of this Act by the concerned LGUs, and shall, as the need arises, amend,
8 modify or revise such rules and regulations to meet the needs of changing times

9 **Sec. 8. Appropriations.** - The Secretaries of the DOT and DENR shall include in
10 their respective Department's program the implementation of this Act, the funding of which
11 shall be included in the annual General Appropriations Act, and shall augment such allocation
12 with internally generated funds of the DOT.

13 **Sec. 9. Separability Clause.** - If any provision of this Act shall be declared
14 unconstitutional or invalid, the other provisions not affected thereby shall remain in full force
15 and effect.

16 **Sec. 10. Repealing Clause.** - All laws, rules, regulations, executive orders, presidential
17 decrees and other issuances inconsistent with any of the provisions of this Act are hereby
18 deemed repealed or amended accordingly.

19 **Sec. 11. Effectivity.** - This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication
20 in the *Official Gazette* or in a newspaper of general circulation.

21 Approved,