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MANILA BULLETIN:

DA, OceanX ink partnership to explore PH maritime sustainability

BY JEL SANTOS

Dec 20, 2024 02:50 PM



The Department of Agriculture (DA) and global ocean exploration nonprofit OceanX have signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to assess the health and diversity of fisheries and marine food resources in the Philippine seas.

DA Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. and OceanX Co-CEO Mark Dalio formalized the agreement on Friday, Dec. 20, signifying a collaborative effort to study, protect, and sustainably develop the country's marine ecosystems.

The agency said the research will be conducted using OceanX's advanced research vessel, OceanXplorer.

"The data we gather will provide invaluable insights into our marine resources, our vast coastline, and the unique biodiversity we hold," Laurel said in a statement.

The agriculture chief said this will help the DA devise better strategies for preserving and optimizing marine resources for future generations.

While specific research plans are still under discussion, the agency said the partnership is expected to deploy state-of-the-art scientific tools to characterize the Philippines' rich marine ecology.

For his part, Dalio emphasized the role of technology and collaboration in advancing marine conservation.

“At OceanX, we believe that cutting-edge technology combined with meaningful collaboration can unlock the mysteries of the ocean and provide actionable insights for sustainable resource management,” he said.

“Our partnership with the Department of Agriculture exemplifies how science and innovation can come together to create a long-term impact, not only in understanding marine ecosystems but also in supporting communities that depend on them,” he added.

The OceanX official said that they are looking forward to working with Filipino scientists, policymakers, and community stakeholders to advance the country's maritime sustainability.

https://mb.com.ph/2024/12/20/da-ocean-x-ink-partnership-to-explore-ph-maritime-sustainability#google_vignette

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

BOC, DA allow sale of ‘smuggled’ rice

[Ghio Ong](#) - The Philippine Star

December 21, 2024 | 12:00am



Photo from the Bureau of Customs shows the rice confiscated by the BOC during a raid on a warehouse in Las Piñas on September 14, 2023

MANILA, Philippines — After discovering P661 million worth of rice suspected to be smuggled, the Bureau of Customs (BOC) and Department of Agriculture (DA) reportedly allowed the owners of the raided warehouses in Bulacan to continue operations “under strict oversight.”

According to the BOC, the operators of nine warehouses that were raided on Dec. 16 in Bocaue and Balagtas towns in Bulacan are allowed to operate to ensure a stable rice supply, “provided that they explain their importation soon.”

The rice was suspected to have been smuggled into the country after the warehouse operators and owners failed to present proof of payment of duties and taxes to the government.

The raid was conducted by the BOC and DA along with officials from the local government units, Philippine Coast Guard and police.

BOC Commissioner Bienvenido Rubio, Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. and several members of the House of Representatives were also present.

According to the BOC, the raiding teams found 249,500 sacks of suspected smuggled rice stored inside the warehouses.

After a dialogue with the warehouse owners, the BOC and DA allowed them to continue operations “under strict oversight.”

“This measure ensures that rice supplies remain uninterrupted and accessible to all Filipinos, particularly during the holiday season,” the BOC in a statement as it awaits the submission of documents showing the payment of taxes and other fees.

<https://www.philstar.com/nation/2024/12/21/2408868/boc-da-allow-sale-smuggled-rice>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

Tainted



FIRST PERSON - Alex Magno - The Philippine Star

December 21, 2024 | 12:00am

The 2025 General Appropriations Act (GAA) was originally scheduled for signing yesterday. The ceremonies were canceled – indefinitely.

The budget is in limbo. It might not be sufficient for the President to do minor surgery on this grossly flawed document. The bicameral conference committee might have to be reconvened to deal with the mess. Or, this most vital piece of legislation might have to be returned to Congress for redrafting.

This mess will not clear in the few working days we have left. Our budget cycle follows the calendar year. By Jan. 1, 2025 the Marcos administration might be forced to work with a reenacted budget. This will be a major setback for the administration politically and for the whole nation economically.

It might even be a watershed moment. Even a Waterloo for an administration that has not even made it to midterm.

By scheduling yesterday's signing ceremonies, the administration clearly expected the budget process to advance routinely. It has overwhelming majorities in both chambers of Congress, a factor that should have enabled the administration to shape the budget according to its vision.

The executive branch was indolent. The legislative branch was acting like it was a separate republic.

What the current budget crisis tells us is that the administration was diffident through the whole process. It sat back and watched the legislators butcher the budget according to their own greed.

One very articulate economist called the 2025 GAA the most corrupt budget the nation ever had. It will be hard to disagree with that.

One might also say this is the most stupid budget the nation has ever seen.

It reduced the allocations for health and education even as it raised the share of unprogrammed appropriations (UA) to P531.7 billion, about eight percent of the total budget. The original executive branch proposal was for UA of P158.7 billion. Our legislators painted the town red and raised this to a whopping P531.7 billion.

The proposed budget took money from institutions such as PhilHealth and the DepEd while pushing billions to some badly defined “AKAP” dole-out program that could be used to effectively buy votes in the midterm elections.

There are at least a dozen truly scandalous features of the 2025 GAA.

The budget for the DPWH was inexplicably increased by P288.6 billion. We know how that works. The projects are distributed to the congressional districts. Somewhere between 30 percent to 60 percent of these project funds are lost to kickbacks.

Allocation for the House of Representatives increased by P17.3 billion. We know how that works, too. Much of the money will go to spending for patronage.

Meanwhile, the DSWD loses about P95.9 billion in the bicameral version of the 2025 GAA. The Philippine Health Insurance Corporation loses its entire P74.4-billion subsidy. The CHED loses P26.9 billion. The Department of Health loses P25.8 billion. NIA loses P23.2 billion. The Department of Agriculture, which we expect will pull us out of our food crisis, loses P20 billion. DOLE, which looks after our workers, loses P18 billion. The Transportation Department loses P16.6 billion.

You catch the drift.

The mainline agencies supporting governance goals suffered losses. A large slush fund that could be directed by the politicians was put together. Very little taxpayer money is allocated for what might be called economic investments. So much money is pushed into what is truly a large pork barrel.

The Comelec put out guidelines to keep the politicians from using budget money for electioneering. The guidelines will simply deodorize a national budget obviously configured for patronage politics.

No one could possibly accuse the 2025 GAA of being a “developmental budget.” This measure is designed to fritter away taxpayer money through funny programs that will not enhance our economy’s competitiveness or efficiency.

Nor will the 2025 GAA help us reduce our national debt.

The proposed 2025 budget amounts to P6.4 trillion, equivalent to 22.1 percent of the GDP and 10 percent higher than the 2024 budget. Revenues are programmed to reach P4.6 trillion, equivalent to 16.2 percent of GDP. Discounting whatever else government may earn through non-tax revenues such as the sale of public assets, the difference will be covered by borrowing.

In 2025, our deficit is expected to reach P1.5 trillion or 5.3 percent of GDP. Because of this, our national government's outstanding debt is expected to increase to P17.4 trillion in 2025. This is equivalent to 60.4 percent of GDP – crossing the standard threshold for fiscal prudence.

To support the profligacy of today's politicians, our children and children's children will be pushed deeper into debt. Nothing forgives that.

For weeks, our legislators distracted us with abusive “quad comm” hearings. Behind the scenes, they were plotting to steal the nation's future.

The 2025 GAA presents President Marcos with something a little more than a hot potato. We have a house on fire. This proposed budget is swindling on the grandest scale. Our people are angry. People everywhere are talking about the features of this budget document like we have never done before. Social media is helping fan the political fire.

This is a profoundly tainted budget. No minor tinkering with the numbers and no cosmetic accounting will arrest the anger building up.

President Marcos has no choice but to trash this polluted document and accept reenactment of the 2024 budget – or court fury in the streets.

<https://www.philstar.com/opinion/2024/12/21/2408832/tainted>

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:

Agriculture sector losses from Mt Kanlaon blast reach P32.34 million

By: [Jordeene B. Lagare @jordeenelagare](#) - [@inquirerdotnet](#)

Philippine Daily Inquirer / 10:00 AM December 21, 2024



DECEPTIVELY CALM Mt. Kanlaon looks deceptively calm in this aerial photo of the volcano's summit taken on Thursday morning, Dec. 12, 2024. But state volcanologists say another explosive eruption similar to what happened on Monday, Dec. 9, can still happen. — The agriculture sector losses following the eruption of Mt. Kanlaon on Negros Island earlier this month reached P32.34 million, as of the latest report of the Department of Agriculture (DA). — PHOTO COURTESY OF TASK FORCE KANLAON

The agriculture sector sustained P32.34 million in losses following the eruption of Mt. Kanlaon on Negros Island earlier this month.

In its latest bulletin, the Department of Agriculture (DA) said rice, corn, high-value crops, and livestock sustained damage following this incident.

Some 780 farmers were affected, and the eruption damaged 832 metric tons of local farm produce across 297 hectares (ha) of agricultural land.

“Additional damage and losses are expected as assessment is ongoing in areas affected by the Kanlaon Volcanic Activity,” the DA said.

High-value crops, including upland and lowland vegetables, spices, fruit trees, rootcrops, coffee, and cacao, incurred P29.25 million in losses. About 742 MT of crops spanning 177 ha of land were affected.

Some P2.58 million worth of rice was hit as well, mostly in vegetative and reproductive stages. The eruption damaged P503,350 in corn produce and P12,000 worth of livestock and poultry.

The Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) said more than 6,800 hectares of sugar plantations were damaged in Negros Occidental, the country’s sugar capital.

In a Viber message to the Inquirer, SRA administrator Pablo Luis Azcona said, “It’s too early to tell” the amount of damage sustained by the local sector due to heavy rains.

Agriculture Assistant Secretary Arnel de Mesa said earlier that affected sugar crops include those in La Carlota, La Castellana, Bago City, and Murcia based on the SRA’s report.

La Carlota is one of the largest sugarcane areas in the archipelago that also houses one of the largest single mills in Negros. On the other hand, the Association of Farmers of Carlota and Pontevedra Inc. comprised 10 percent of the domestic production.

Azcona said earlier the country’s buffer stock and sugar output would decline if the ashfall from Mt. Kanlaon affected standing crops of sugar.

He explained that the ash fall’s “burning effect” on sugarcane could reduce harvests if the eruption dumps more volcanic ash onto sugarcane areas.

He also said plants could die as the harmful compound from the ash fall could burn sugarcane leaves and cause early maturation.

The DA said 1,010 animals were relocated to various evacuation sites in La Castellana and La Carlota, including its Negros Occidental Research Outreach Station.

It is positioning and deploying rescue vehicles and veterinary supplies for livestock animals. The agency is closely coordinating with national and regional disaster risk reduction and management as well as local government counterparts for response strategies.

The DA is prepared to distribute rice and corn seeds, alongside drugs and biologics for livestock animals.

Affected farmers can tap the quick response fund for the rehabilitation of affected areas and secure up to P25,000 in loans from the Agricultural Credit Policy Council's Survival and Recovery (SURE) Loan Program, payable in three years at zero interest.

The Philippine Crop Insurance Corp. is indemnifying insured affected farmers.

<https://business.inquirer.net/497985/agriculture-losses-from-mt-kanlaon-blast-reach-p32-34-million>

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:

Fish products shipment at PH ports falls by 25.5% in Nov 2024

By: [Jordeene B. Lagare @jordeenelagare](#) - [@inquirerdotnet](#)

Philippine Daily Inquirer / 08:49 AM December 21, 2024



Stock image of fish/INQUIRER FILES

The shipment of fish products at regional ports declined by 25.5 percent in November following the implementation of a temporary fishing ban in major fishing areas.

The Philippine Fisheries Development Authority (PFDA) said regional fish ports unloaded 37,018.50 metric tons (MT) of fish last month from 49,718.434 MT in the same period a year ago.

The figure was also lower than the unloading volume of 47,240.81 MT in October, declining for two months.

Among regional ports, the General Santos Fish Port Complex recorded the highest share in unloading volume at 42.9 percent or 15,864.03 MT despite experiencing a minor setback.

The Navotas Fish Port Complex came second with 38.9 percent or 14,386.14 MT as the number of municipal fishing vessels arriving in the area decreased.

The Iloilo Fish Port Complex and Bulan Fish Port Complex delivered 1,865.99 MT and 1,614.95 MT of fish to their clients, respectively.

The Lucena Fish Port Complex provided 1,503.63 MT of fishery products while the Zamboanga Fish Port Complex supplied 969.22 MT to consumers.

The Davao Fish Port Complex followed with 814.13 MT and the Camaligan Fish Ports with 0.405 MT.

The contraction in fish unloading volume occurred during the three-month closed fishing season in key fishing areas, a policy aimed at replenishing fish stocks.

It is a conservative measure implemented by the government annually to protect target fish species during their peak spawning period and address other concerns such as overfishing and climate change.

The closed fishing season is implemented in the Visayan Sea and Zamboanga Peninsula from Nov. 15 to Feb. 15 each year and Nov. 1 to Jan. 31 in Northern Palawan.

The Department of Agriculture (DA) and Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) stood pat at this policy despite calls to lift the temporary fishing ban as it causes an “artificial shortage” of fish resulting in importation.

“The closed fishing season creates an artificial shortage that justifies the importation of tons of fish. Ultimately, fishers are incurring losses because the value of their catch declines as the market is flooded with imported fish,” fishers’ group Pambansang Lakas ng Kilusang Mamamalakaya ng Pilipinas said earlier.

However, BFAR Executive Director Isidro Velayo Jr. said the policy is backed by scientific studies and local consultations, while Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. said this measure helps ensure sustainable fish production nationwide.

“Importation addresses temporary supply gaps caused by the closed-fishing season or events like typhoons. It complements, not replaces, local fish production to keep prices stable,” Tiu Laurel said.

<https://business.inquirer.net/497982/fish-products-shipment-at-ph-ports-falls-by-25-5-in-nov-2024>

BUSINESS WORLD:

Animal Kingdom partners with NFRDI to promote FishKwela

December 20, 2024 | 4:07 pm



The Animal Kingdom Foundation (AKF) and the National Fisheries Research and Development Institute (NFRDI) of the Department of Agriculture (DA-NFRDI) have forged ties to integrate fish welfare into the FishKwela program.

The Animal Kingdom Foundation (AKF) and the National Fisheries Research and Development Institute (NFRDI) of the Department of Agriculture (DA-NFRDI) have forged ties to integrate fish welfare into the FishKwela program. This collaboration aims to promote sustainable aquaculture practices, improve the livelihoods of fish farmers and promote fish welfare.

FishKwela is an innovative training platform of the DA-NFRDI to enhance the skills and knowledge of local communities regarding the various aspects of fisheries and aquaculture and support the advancement of the country's fisheries sector.

Through this partnership, NFRDI and AKF aim to incorporate fish welfare in various educational campaigns, workshops and activities to empower fisherfolk, fisherfolk organizations and aquaculture operators with knowledge of sustainable fishing practices, among others.

“When the welfare of fish is prioritized, it focuses on a holistic approach... although it differs from our usual activities at NFRDI, we believe it will serve as an equally important and valuable platform,” said Dr. Lilian Garcia, executive director of NFRDI.

“The partnership will be productive and fruitful because it is our passion to introduce fish welfare in the country. We hope that we touch the hearts of the aquaculture farming industry to consider fish welfare in their farm practices” said Atty. Heidi Caguioa, president and program director of Animal Kingdom Foundation.



The partnership of NFRDI and AKF under the FishKwela initiative is expected to be a game-changer in the Philippines’ efforts to make fish welfare the new norm, especially since these directly affect animal welfare and more importantly, human welfare.

Both NFRDI and AKF are committed to the project’s long-term success, as it aligns with the Philippines’ commitment to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 14: Life Below Water.

AKF started the movement for fish welfare in the Philippines in 2021. AKF is known for its successful campaign “End Dog Meat Trade” and its other farmed animal welfare campaign: “Cage-free, Go Cruel-free”.

In 2021-2022, AKF initiated research to explore the existing fish welfare practices in the country. The findings revealed that fish welfare is not a completely new concept. Fisherfolk has been practicing

indigenous methods to assess water quality, enhance feed efficiency, and more. However, there is still a knowledge gap that leaves fisherfolk feeling helpless.

“During our study, we identified challenges that need to be addressed. Through our partnership, we aim to create a positive impact and enhance fish welfare in the aquaculture industry in the Philippines,” added Caguioa.

The MOA signing was held on December 9 at the NFRDI Office. It was attended by AKF’s campaign officers—Claren May Echano, Tony Inting and Irven Bustamante—as well as key officials from NFRDI, including Dr. Mudjekeewis Santos, Dr. Ulysses Montojo, Dr. Minerva Fatimae Ventolero and Casiano Choresca Jr. and Dr. Maria Theresa Mutia, chief of the Freshwater Fisheries Research and Development Center, who also delivered the closing message.

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