



June 1, 2011

His Excellency Benigno S. Aquino III
President, Republic of the Philippines
Chairperson, Climate Change Commission

Attention: Secretary Mary Ann Lucille L. Sering
Vice-Chairperson, Climate Change Commission

Dear President Aquino,

The Wild Bird Club of the Philippines (WBCP), the country's lead bird watching and bird conservation advocate, expresses our alarm and considers as a serious menace the plan by the Philippine Reclamation Authority (PRA) to continue reclamation and real estate development around the remaining coastal wetland and last refuge of endemic Philippine Ducks in Metro Manila.

The PRA sponsored scheme known as the Three Island Reclamation and Development Project involves 635 hectares of upscale private residential, commercial and tourism estate which will surround the protected mangroves, lagoons and ponds designated as the Las Piñas-Parañaque Critical Habitat and Ecotourism Area (LPPCHEA).

Besides the obvious role that these mangroves and lagoons play as a sanctuary for migratory birds and as a spawning ground for fish and other sea life, these wetlands and beach forests help sequester carbon emissions and filter water pollutants and runoff from the land. The wetlands also form a natural protective barrier to wave erosion and storm surges.

In 2010, the National Capital Region office of the Department of the Environment and Natural Resources prepared a Vulnerability Assessment Report expressing its concern over threats to the habitat. The report noted that development along the lines of the PRA's plan will greatly impede circulation of saltwater while a proposed channel to extend the mouth of Parañaque River westward will cut across the bird roosts and breeding areas in the northern section of Freedom Island. The report also pointed out that the resulting storm surge area in the present lagoon is expected to adversely affect habitat functions.

By preventing the entry of sea water from Manila Bay into these two lagoons, land reclamation will change soil and water quality and could eventually kill off the mangroves and the crustaceans, worms, and mollusks on which birds feed. Disturbance caused by landfill and heavy construction operations, as well as increased vehicular traffic and light pollution also pose unnecessary stress to birdlife and marine species.

The WBCP is not opposed to development. In fact we favor development of the sustainable kind. Thus, we assert that the PRA reclamation scheme is not only poorly conceived, it is also detrimental to public-private efforts to minimize carbon emissions, promote conservation and mitigate the impact of extreme weather events brought about by climate change. We are also deeply concerned of the impact of the PRA plan on the already precarious economic situation of fisher folk and shellfish gatherers who depend on the conservation of mangroves and mudflats for livelihood and subsistence in eight coastal barangays of Las Piñas and Parañaque.

It will interest the Commission to know that habitat destruction has already led to significant drops in numbers of migratory birds in this part of Manila Bay. In the 1970s, ornithologists counted 28,000 birds during a one-day survey. The WBCP is sad to report that the number is down to 5,000 birds.

Species decline as a result of climate change is often overlooked. It is also an issue that reaches across borders. As a feeding and rest stop along the East Asian Migratory Flyway, the mangroves and lagoons shelter more than 2.2% of the global population of Black-winged Stilts, over 0.5% of the worldwide population of Common Greenshank sandpipers and the rare Chinese Egret. The lagoons are also the last holdout in this part of the Metro Manila coast to 80 Papan or Philippine Duck, 2% of the population of this waterfowl species found nowhere else in the world.

Strong wildlife populations today are needed to increase the resilience of species in the face of climate change. Our purpose is to assist wildlife to cope in a landscape already shaped by human activity and to make it easier for these species to find suitable habitats before climate change adds a further burden.

The Las Piñas-Parañaque Critical Habitat and Ecotourism Area is part of the pan-Asian lifeline of protected areas that become more important with climate change, thus our determined opposition to the PRA reclamation project.

In our view the Philippine Reclamation Authority is no longer relevant to a planet threatened by sea level rise and extreme weather events brought about by climate change. Instead of one-sided hard engineering projects like commercial land reclamation, this agency should be re-oriented to pursue a strategic and sustainable source-to-sea / catchment approach which involves the following:

- a) Wetlands and coastal restoration to keep these healthy to retain water
- b) Management and restoration of inland and coastal floodplains
- c) Protecting and expanding forests, mangroves and wetlands—including constructed wetlands—to filter pollutants, sequester carbon, and soak up water for slow release into the eco-system
- d) Recognition of the role of natural habitats like wetlands in prevention of flooding and protection of coasts against sea level rise

The Wild Bird Club of the Philippines and other conservation groups hope to duplicate environmental success stories like the Mai Po Reserve and Hong Kong Wetland Park in Hong Kong, Guandu Nature Park in Taiwan and Thailand's Bang Poo in the embattled section of Manila Bay.

Whilst opposed to further reclamation and heavy construction in and adjacent to the mangroves and lagoons the WBCP has a ready alternative for protecting and expanding the LPPCHEA. We plan to establish a nature trail through the beach forest, walkways in the mangroves, as well as bird observation hides and towers. The main feature in the built up area will be a modest natural history center and laboratories. Amenities will include a hostel for overnight visitors, dining areas, washrooms and a parking lot. Meanwhile, sections of the lagoons will also be set aside for local subsistence fisheries and shellfish gathering. We are eyeing areas for further expansion of mangroves and for restoration of riparian vegetation in the mouth of the Parañaque River. Over time, it is hoped that offshore sea grass beds will also be restored.

To give the Commission a better appreciation of the issue, we extend this open invitation to a tour of the coastal lagoons and islands and to meet with conservationists and outdoor enthusiasts who are working to protect and expand wilderness spaces and public green corridors throughout the metropolis.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael C. Lu". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Michael C. Lu
President, Wild Bird Club of the Philippines