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SENATE

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RECEIVED BY:

Introduced by Senator Loren B. Legarda

RESOLUTION

DIRECTING THE APPROPRIATE SENATE COMMITTEES TO CONDUCT AN INQUIRY, IN AID OF LEGISLATION, INTO THE STATE OF PHILIPPINE MARINE AND COASTAL ECOSYSTEMS, THE PHILIPPINES' PROGRESS TOWARD THE GLOBAL 30X30 MARINE CONSERVATION TARGET, AND THE MEASURES NECESSARY TO STRENGTHEN MARINE PROTECTION, RESTORATION, AND SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT

WHEREAS, the Philippines is an archipelagic nation situated within the Coral Triangle, one of the world's richest centers of marine biodiversity, whose coral reefs, seagrass beds, mangrove forests, and surrounding waters support an extraordinary variety of marine life and sustain the food, livelihoods, and cultural traditions of coastal communities;

WHEREAS, Article II, Section 16 of the 1987 Constitution recognizes the right of the people to a balanced and healthful ecology, while Article XII, Section 2 mandates the State to protect the nation's marine wealth in its archipelagic waters, territorial sea, and exclusive economic zone (EEZ), establishing a clear constitutional responsibility to conserve and manage these resources for present and future generations;

WHEREAS, the country's marine ecosystems face increasing pressure from rising sea temperatures, ocean acidification, pollution, destructive fishing practices, poorly regulated coastal development, and the loss of important marine habitats, threatening the ecological processes that allow fish populations and other marine species to survive and recover;

WHEREAS, coral reefs provide shelter and breeding grounds for numerous marine species, mangroves protect coastlines and serve as nurseries for fish and other aquatic

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life, and seagrass beds provide food and habitat while helping store carbon, demonstrating how damage to one part of a marine ecosystem can affect the health and productivity of surrounding waters;

WHEREAS, the loss of these habitats has consequences beyond the immediate area where the damage occurs, as fish move between breeding, nursery, feeding, and migration grounds, making it necessary to protect connected marine ecosystems rather than manage individual sites without regard to their relationship with surrounding waters;

WHEREAS, the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF), adopted in 2022 under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), established under its Target 3 the global ambition of effectively conserving and managing at least 30% of terrestrial and inland water areas and 30% of coastal and marine areas by 2030, commonly known as the "30x30" target, through protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs);

WHEREAS, the 30x30 target recognizes that the success of conservation depends on the location, ecological importance, connectivity, and actual management of protected areas, including respect for the rights and participation of indigenous peoples and local communities, so that conservation produces measurable improvements in biodiversity and ecosystem health;

WHEREAS, the declaration of a marine protected area (MPA) does not automatically guarantee the protection of marine life within its boundaries, particularly where destructive activities continue, monitoring and enforcement are inadequate, or local institutions lack the personnel and resources to implement conservation measures;

WHEREAS, the Philippine Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (PBSAP) 2024–2040, adopted through Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Administrative Order No. 2025-23, establishes a national target of effectively conserving and managing at least 16% of coastal and marine areas by 2040, presenting a different percentage and implementation timeframe from the global 30x30 ambition for 2030;

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WHEREAS, the Philippines' reporting under the CBD identifies approximately 35.03 million hectares, or 15.91% of the country's marine area, as existing and proposed marine conservation areas combined; this figure includes proposed sites and therefore cannot, without further verification, be treated as the extent of marine areas already legally protected or effectively conserved;

WHEREAS, reconciling the global 30x30 ambition for 2030 with the national conservation target for 2040 requires a clear account of what has already been protected, which additional areas may qualify for conservation, the measures needed to manage them effectively, and a verifiable government roadmap identifying priority sites, responsible agencies, interim milestones, funding needs, and indicators of ecological recovery;

WHEREAS, it is essential to distinguish marine areas already legally protected and effectively managed from areas merely proposed for designation or identified for their biodiversity importance, and to avoid counting overlapping designations or proposed sites as evidence of conservation already achieved;

WHEREAS, Philippine marine conservation must cover both nearshore and offshore ecosystems, recognizing the ecological importance of existing protected areas such as Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park and the Philippine Rise Marine Reserve, as well as the need to assess additional conservation measures for the Verde Island Passage, the Sulu-Sulawesi Marine Ecoregion, and other important marine habitats and spawning grounds, including those within the West Philippine Sea;

WHEREAS, the establishment or expansion of protected marine areas must take into account the different legal and institutional arrangements governing municipal waters, archipelagic waters, the territorial sea, and the EEZ, as well as the Philippines' sovereign rights, maritime entitlements, and obligations under international law;

WHEREAS, marine conservation also requires effective coordination among national government agencies, local government units (LGUs), scientific institutions, coastal communities, and other stakeholders, particularly where ecosystems extend across administrative boundaries or where the protection of one area depends on the proper management of adjoining waters;

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WHEREAS, establishing and maintaining MPAs entails continuing expenditures for scientific surveys, patrols, monitoring equipment, habitat restoration, personnel, and community participation, making sustained government funding and carefully designed financing arrangements essential to the long-term success of conservation efforts;

WHEREAS, innovative financing mechanisms such as blue bonds, blended financing, international conservation grants, and appropriate debt-for-nature arrangements may provide additional resources for marine conservation, provided that these mechanisms are transparent, financially responsible, and directed toward measurable environmental outcomes and the welfare of affected communities;

WHEREAS, the growing threats to Philippine seas, together with the country's commitments under the KMGBF and its own national biodiversity strategy, underscore the need for Congress to examine whether existing laws, programs, institutional arrangements, and public expenditures are sufficient to achieve meaningful and lasting marine protection;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, AS IT IS HEREBY RESOLVED, to direct the Senate Committee on Environment, Natural Resources and Climate Change, in coordination with the Committee on Economic Affairs and other appropriate committees, to conduct an inquiry, in aid of legislation, into the present condition of Philippine marine and coastal ecosystems, the country's contribution toward the global 30x30 marine conservation target, and the measures necessary to strengthen marine protection and restoration, particularly:

a) **Actual marine conservation coverage.** The verified area, location, legal status, and management effectiveness of existing MPAs and recognized OECMs, with separate totals for legally protected sites, effectively managed areas, proposed designations, and sites identified for conservation, including a method for avoiding double-counting of overlapping areas and independently checking reported figures;

b) **National targets and measurable implementation roadmap.** The relationship between the global 30x30 target for 2030 and the national target of conserving 16% of coastal and marine areas by 2040 under the PBSAP, including the basis for these targets and a possible step-by-step roadmap identifying

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priority sites, annual or other periodic milestones, lead agencies, target dates, budget requirements, and measurable indicators of ecological protection and recovery;

c) **Effectiveness of existing protected areas.** Whether declared MPAs and other recognized conservation areas are adequately managed and enforced, including the availability of management plans, personnel, regular patrols, scientific monitoring, and reliable information showing improvements in marine biodiversity and ecosystem conditions;

d) **Priority areas for additional protection.** The identification of ecologically important nearshore and offshore areas requiring protection or restoration, including coral reefs, mangrove forests, seagrass beds, breeding grounds, fish nurseries, and migration corridors, and the criteria for establishing connected networks of protected areas rather than isolated conservation sites;

e) **Protection of important Philippine seascapes.** The existing protection and possible expansion of conservation measures for priority marine areas such as the Verde Island Passage, Philippine Rise, Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park, the Sulu-Sulawesi Marine Ecoregion, and ecologically important areas of the West Philippine Sea, subject to the applicable legal regimes and the protection of Philippine sovereign rights and maritime entitlements;

f) **Restoration of damaged marine ecosystems.** The adequacy of government programs to rehabilitate damaged coral reefs, mangrove forests, seagrass beds, and other marine habitats, including measures to address pollution, destructive coastal activities, habitat conversion, and the effects of climate change;

g) **Agency coordination and accountability.** The respective responsibilities of the DENR, Department of Agriculture (DA), Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR), Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), relevant maritime agencies, and LGUs in identifying, establishing, financing, managing, and monitoring marine conservation areas, including designated agency leads, periodic public reporting on milestones and ecological outcomes, and measures to address overlapping mandates and implementation gaps;

h) **Conservation financing and resource requirements.** The funding needed to establish, maintain, and effectively manage marine protected areas, the

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adequacy and utilization of existing government appropriations, and the feasibility of using blue-finance mechanisms and international partnerships with appropriate safeguards, accountability, and measurable conservation results;

i) **Participation of coastal communities.** Measures to ensure that indigenous peoples, municipal fisherfolk, and other affected communities participate meaningfully in conservation planning and management, with due regard to customary rights, traditional livelihoods, equitable benefit-sharing, and the long-term sustainability of local conservation initiatives; and

j) **Necessary legislative reforms.** The adequacy of existing laws and institutional arrangements for marine biodiversity conservation, including possible amendments concerning protected areas, marine spatial planning, inter-agency coordination, conservation financing, and the proposed Blue Economy Act under Senate Bill No. 168, with the objective of establishing clear obligations and measurable conservation outcomes.

RESOLVED, FURTHER, to request the concerned Senate committees, in the course of the inquiry, to obtain from the DENR, DA, BFAR, DFA, Department of Finance (DOF), and other relevant agencies a verified, disaggregated national inventory and map of existing, recognized, and proposed marine conservation areas; the methodology for computing actual protected and effectively managed coverage; scientific and management-effectiveness assessments; priority sites and proposed timetables; indicative annual milestones, responsible offices, financing requirements, and ecological performance indicators; and other information necessary to evaluate the country's progress toward its marine conservation commitments;

RESOLVED, FINALLY, that copies of this Resolution be furnished to the agencies concerned for their information and appropriate action.

Adopted,

LOREN LEGARDA

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