

PRESS RELEASE
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DENR-BMB renews call for stronger measures to combat illegal wildlife trade
By: DENR-ADB/GEF Project on Combating Environmental Organized Crime in the Philippines

On World Animal Day, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) has reiterated its call for the approval of two Senate bills that seek to strengthen Republic Act 9147 or the Wildlife Resources Conservation and Protection Act of 2001.

DENR-Biodiversity Management Bureau Director Datu Tungko M. Saikol said it is high time to amend the gaps in the law two decades after its implementation.

“We commend the House of Representatives for passing House Bill 9833 revising the Wildlife Act of 2001 on third and final reading, and call on our good Senators to pass Senate Bills No. 2078 and 2079 to strengthen our fight against wildlife crimes. Almost 20 years after the Wildlife Act took effect, the threat of extinction of wildlife species in the Philippines is still not far behind, wreaking havoc to our biodiversity that supports our livelihood and economy,” Saikol said on Monday, October 4.

“Illegal wildlife trade, which is the second biggest threat to species survival globally, increases the risks of zoonotic diseases, or the transfer of diseases from animal to humans, leading to outbreaks,” Saikol said. “With the lessons learned from the Covid-19 pandemic, it is imperative to pass a strengthened wildlife conservation and protection law without delay,” he also asserted.

Saikol also mentioned that the law, once amended, will effectively deter wildlife trafficking not only in the country, but also in other global destination points. “As a result, it will prevent if not eliminate the incidence, at least in the Philippines, of another infectious disease such as Covid-19, which originated in animals and caused unprecedented loss of human lives worldwide,” he also said.

SB 2078 and SB 2079, filed by Senator Cynthia Villar and Senate Majority Leader Juan Miguel Zubiri, respectively, seek the imposition of stronger and more specific penalties, the strengthening of enforcement capacity, and the removal of legal loopholes exploited by illegal wildlife traders.

From 2010 to 2020, more than 67,500 wildlife specimens worth at least P248M were confiscated from 523 suspected law violators. At least 153 criminal complaints have been filed in court, with 29 cases resolved and 47 criminals convicted.

The Philippines, among the world’s 17 mega-diverse countries that host two-thirds of the Earth’s biodiversity, has become an important source, transit, and destination point for illegal wildlife trade, which is now the fourth largest illegal trade worldwide behind illegal drugs, arms, and human trafficking.

The value of illegal wildlife trade in the country is estimated at P50 billion yearly or \$1 billion, including the market value of wildlife and its resources, their ecological role and value, damage to habitats, and loss in potential ecotourism revenues.