

MANGROVES OF MANILA BAY

DANTE "DAN" PASIA

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Populations in the Past

In the provinces of Bataan, Pampanga, Bulacan and Cavite and Metro-Manila (also known as the National Capital Region (NCR)) in the 1920s, hardly there are 1 to 2 million (2,000,000) Filipinos. Also at the same time the Bureau of Science of the Commonwealth Government under the administration of the Americans had recorded 60,000 hectares of mangroves in Manila Bay. Seacows or Dugongs do abound in the waters of the bay as the corals and seagrass beds were very much alive and healthy during those days.

Developments and Destructions

Now barely 3,000 hectares of mangroves are standing in the shores of Bataan, Pampanga, Bulacan, NCR and Cavite. When the world renown marinelife conservationist, (late) Jacques Cousteau visited the Philippines, he brought the vessel Calypso to do underwater documentation on our diverse aquatic and marinelife to include the dugongs in Palawan. In a press conference in Manila Hotel (by the Manila Bay) he told us, being a Catholic, of this arguments with the Vatican on population control and policies. He told us vehemently that so called progress and projects due to a run-away population growth had destroyed our beautiful and diverse aquatic and marinelife in the seas and oceans.

Marinelife in Manila Bay

When I attended the 1st International Conference on EMECS in Kobe, Japan in August of 1990, one of the sessions I attended was that of Jessica Munoz of the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) of the Department of Agriculture (DA) of the Philippines. She said in her oral presentation that "Manila Bay does not have any concrete management plan formulated to protect, conserve and revive its fishery resources".

On the fisheries of the bay, she presented results that showed that the bay possesses the characteristics typical of an over-fished fishing grounds namely: (1) Fluctuation of Annual Production (2) Decreasing Trend in CPUE (3) Decreasing Trend of the Size of the Fish (4) Succession of Species Composition (5) Decline in the Number of Species Per Fishing Operation and (6) Increase of Boat Density.

Recently there is a controversy between the commercial fishing operators and the marginal or municipal fishing communities on the so-called DENR Department Administrative Order (DAO) #17. Such as order would close the bay to commercial fishing operations. Recently when interviewed by this author, Ms. Jessica Munoz, who now heads the Fishery Resources Management Group of Department of Agriculture, said that with this DAO 17 the bay will recuperate.

Trek to Track

A walk from barangay to barangay, town to town, in the bay will be conducted and performed by this author and some volunteers to inventory the remaining stands of

mangroves forest. Such a conservation and research trek will be documented by cameras, both still and video. A system of recording stands and species identification will be devised by the team with the Ecosystem Research and Development Bureau of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR). This is to present to the nation and the global community that our mangroves in Manila Bay have to be restored with the help of all. We shall tap the global environment facility of the UN for help.

The distance from Mariveles (of Bataan) to Maragondon (of Cavite) could be about 700 kilometers. A "straight walk" could be difficult. On the occasion of the World Environment Day, June 5, 2003 our trek will begin from Mariveles to Maragondon. The trek will also be an information campaign to mobilize all villages to plant mangroves on their shores. Our slogan shall be **BALIK BAKAWANAN AY BALIK SAGANA AT GANDA** (Return the Mangroves for Prosperity and Beauty). We hope to complete the trek in the month of July and make the final report of the trek for presentation in the forthcoming 6th EMECS in Thailand.