

DENR gives biz owners 30 days to remove illegal structures in Coron, warns them of “DENR” impostors



The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) is giving 75 business owners 30 days to remove and self-demolish their structures built on the waters and within the easement zones of Coron, Palawan.

The directive is cited in the Notices to Vacate served by Task Force Coron on Thursday to erring establishments located in four barangays, namely Tagumpay, Poblacion 1, Poblacion 3, and Poblacion 5. These establishments include hotels, restaurants, dive shops, laundry shops, and lodging and boarding houses.

The Notice to Vacate specified provisions of the Water Code of the Philippines which prohibit occupation of river banks, sea shores and lakes within a zone of three meters in urban areas and 40 meters in forest areas. Barangay Tagumpay is classified as timberland, the rest as urban areas.

The Notice also cited the Civil Code of the Philippines which defines shores “and others of

similar character” as property of public dominion. The Civil Code also declares as nuisance “establishment, business or condition of property, or anything else which obstructs or interferes with the free passage of any body of water.”

“Malinaw po sa batas na wala dapat nakatayong mga istruktura sa mga ganitong lugar. Ipinapatupad lang po namin kung ano ang nasa batas para maprotektahan at mapanatiling malinis, maayos, at maganda ang bayan ng Coron,” Engineer Roman Legaspi, head of Task Force Coron said.

Coron is famous for its pristine island beaches and breathtaking landscapes. It receives an increasing number of tourists every year, with an estimate of 178,000 tourists recorded in 2016. The influx of tourists prompted proliferation of business establishments, some of which do not only encroached easement zones, but were also found to have contributed to water pollution by discharging untreated wastewater directly into Coron Bay.

This aggravated Coron’s water problem, which is mainly attributed to the town’s lack of a centralized wastewater treatment facility.

“Kaya hindi lang encroachment ang tinitingnan natin. Sinisiguro rin natin na sumusunod ang mga business establishments sa mga batas ukol sa tamang paraan ng pagtatapon ng basura at maruming tubig, at iba pang batas na nagpoprotekta sa ating kalikasan,” Legaspi expressed.

DENR MIMAROPA (Mindoro, Marinduque, Romblon, and Palawan) created Task Force Coron on February 26, 2018 in response to a marching order of DENR Secretary Roy A. Cimatu to ensure enforcement of environmental laws in the country’s prime beach destinations. Task Force Coron is composed of representatives from DENR and Environmental Management Bureau and coordinates with the local government of Coron and other agencies, such as Palawan Council for Sustainable Development, Department of the Tourism, Department of the Interior and Local Government, Philippine Navy, and Philippine Coast Guard.

In a related development, DENR MIMAROPA cautions establishment owners affected by the cleanup drive in Coron and elsewhere in the region not to deal with impostors posing as DENR officials.

“We urge you not to deal with people who obviously want to extort from business owners,” says DENR MIMAROPA Regional Director Natividad Bernardino.

“The DENR does not authorize anyone to deal with business owners other than members of the Task Forces, which were tasked to lead the cleanup and rehabilitation of beaches in Coron, El Nido, and Puerto Galera,” she adds.

The warning came about following reports that DENR field officials in Oriental Mindoro and Palawan were receiving calls and text messages from unknown persons identifying themselves as Secretary Cimatú, and seeking copies of establishments which were issued Notices.

The Office of Secretary Cimatú has been informed about the incident, which then advised DENR MIMAROPA to take appropriate security measures. ###