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## Manila Bay Area Environmental Atlas now out

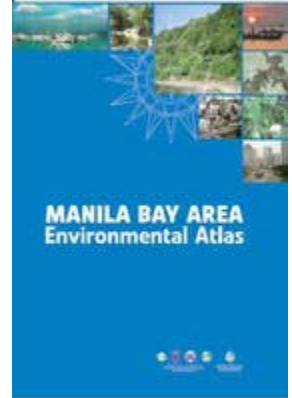
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Development planners and environmental authorities in eight Luzon provinces, including the National Capital Region (NCR), will now better be able to harmonize their efforts to rehabilitate the Manila Bay while tapping its commercial and industrial value.

Thanks to the Manila Bay Area Environmental Atlas (MBEA) which is now available after Environment and Natural Resources Secretary Lito Atienza launched the book during the inauguration of the newly renovated 800-sq m building of the Partnerships in Environmental Management for the Seas of East Asia (PEMSEA) located inside the DENR compound in Quezon City.

The MBEA, which took three years of collaborative work with government and private institutions, is a project of PEMSEA through its Manila Bay Environmental Management Project (MBEMP). The book is a comprehensive profile of the 1,800-sq km surface area of the Manila Bay and its 17,000-sq km watershed area called "Manila Bay Area" (MBA) in terms of its physical, biological and socio-economic characteristics.



MBA covers portions of Metro Manila, Region 3 and Region 4A where some 25 million people live. On the other hand, Manila Bay's coastline is around 190 kilometers.

"The task of PEMSEA on environmental management of the seas is one very important aspect in our quest for economic emancipation," Atienza noted, adding that multiple and conflicting uses, pollution and habitat destruction are among problems plaguing MBA that covers NCR as well as Bataan, Pampanga, Bulacan, Cavite, Nueva Ecija, Tarlac, Rizal and Laguna provinces.

Atienza said the Manila Bay's rehabilitation is long overdue, as well as that of Laguna de Bay and other important bodies of water. He added that the contribution of the atlas will yield long-term beneficial results for MBA and the country.

The atlas details the area's contribution to people and the economy, both on the local and national scale. Online orders can be made through [www.pemsea.org/knowledge-center/pemsea-publications](http://www.pemsea.org/knowledge-center/pemsea-publications).

"There's much to be done but we believe saving and restoring Manila Bay can be a major step towards saving the marine environment," he said.

The atlas likewise provides proposals on how to harmonize with the target zoning plan all existing land use plans and development initiatives within the area, delineating water boundaries of coastal municipalities and cities concerned including sea/water use and foreshore uses in comprehensive land use plans of local government units (LGUs) there.

The proposed zoning plan will also identify protected area zones, rehabilitation or buffer zones, sustainable fisheries use zones, coastal tourism and other eco-tourism zones, port and shipping zones, residential and commercial zones, agricultural and institutional zones, industrial zones, waste management zones and forest zones.

The atlas identifies environmental issues and documented good practices on overcoming challenges to MBA's sustainable development and management.

The book also carries 54 thematic and composite maps annotated with textual descriptions to highlight important features of the bay area including 40 tables and graphs describing the environmental and economic conditions in key points of the bay area, both on land and water.

A PEMSEA study conducted in 2005 showed that partial total value of Manila Bay area's tourism, agriculture and transportation uses and benefits to the country is over PhP8 billion annually.

It shows that MBA contributes to about 55 percent of Philippine gross domestic product but that the watershed continues to fall prey to habitat degradation, overfishing, pollution and other pressures of urbanization. The study, however, reported that damages to the bay and the resulting socio-economic impacts could run up to PhP4 billion in losses per year.

The study points mainly to unabated destructive human activities and that valuable resources found within the MBA must be protected and managed sustainably.

"It's also a warning on what could be lost if concerted actions aren't taken," PEMSEA added.

For his part, PEMSEA Regional Program Director Dr. Chua Thia-Eng explained that the atlas "is a very significant document containing data that can be used to aid efforts in restoring Manila Bay" and is an indispensable tool to provide data needed in forming policies, plans, decisions and actions for MBA's rehabilitation.

The DENR has played host to PEMSEA's office for 14 years since 1993 in support of its task to check the spread of all sorts of pollution in the East Asian sea from land-to-sea based activities.

The PEMSEA works with 12 countries - Cambodia, North and South Korea, Japan, Indonesia, Singapore, China, Thailand, Vietnam, Laos, Timor Leste, and the Philippines – to implement an integrated management program on marine pollution, biodiversity, fisheries, aquaculture, sea-level rise, tourism and mangrove conservation.

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