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SENATE  
S.B. No. 432

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**Introduced by SENATOR LOREN LEGARDA**

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**AN ACT ESTABLISHING THE VERDE ISLAND PASSAGE INTER-AGENCY TASK FORCE TO COORDINATE, SUPPORT AND ENHANCE THE ESTABLISHMENT OF MARINE PROTECTED AREAS AND PROMOTE ECO-TOURISM INDUSTRY IN THESE AREAS, PROVIDE FUNDS THEREFOR AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.**

Explanatory Note

Based on a 2005 joint study by marine scientists from the World Conservation Union and the Smithsonian Institute of the United States, the Verde Island Passage Marine Corridor--a 1.14 million hectare stretch of water found along portions of the provinces of Batangas, Oriental Mindoro, Occidental Mindoro, Marinduque and Romblon, is believed to be the "center of the center of marine shore fish biodiversity in the world.<sup>1</sup> Located right in the middle of the Coral Triangle and with the highest concentration of marine species in any region of the world, the Verde Island Passage Marine Corridor is an important source of livelihood for over 7 million people living along these provinces who engage, among other things, in fishing, aquaculture and tourism<sup>2</sup>. At the same time, it serves an important passageway for both commercial and industrial ships travelling from Manila or Batangas going to the southern parts of the country and vice versa.

Given its rich biodiversity and economic potential, there is a clear need for government and other stakeholders to coordinate their efforts in ensuring the sustainable use of the resources of the Verde Island Passage. A significant step in this direction was the formulation of the Verde Island Passage Management Plan by the Ad Hoc Task Force on the Verde Island Passage after consulting with the private sector, civil society organizations, and the local government units<sup>3</sup>. Since then, a large number of marine protected areas has been established within the Verde Island Passage Marine Corridor. According to Conservation International—a member of the Ad Hoc Task Force, from over 1,000 hectares in 2005, the areas covered by MPAs span more than 17,000 hectares by 2011.

<sup>1</sup> Carpenter, K.E. and Springer, V.G. (2005) "The center of the center of marine shore fish biodiversity: the Philippine Islands. Environmental Biology of Fishes. 72. 467- 480.

<sup>2</sup> Boquiren, R., Di Carlo, G., Quibilan, M.C. (2010) "Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment of the Verde Island Passage, Philippines." Technical Report. Conservation International, Arlington, Virginia, USA.

<sup>3</sup> In 28 November 2006, President Gloria Arroyo signed Executive Order No. 578 entitled "Establishing the national policy on biological diversity prescribing its implementation throughout the country, particularly in the Sulu Sulawesi Marine Ecosystem and the Verde Island Passage Marine Corridor.

Yet, the Verde Island Passage still remains under threat from over-exploitation and just recently, by climate change. As an important sealane, this unique biodiversity hotspot is also under constant threat from possible oil spills and other chemical contamination from industries located along the port of Batangas. Recent events would show that a coordinated effort in managing the MPAs and effective implementation of the integrated coastal resource management framework by the different stakeholders are key factors in safeguarding this important marine treasure.

This bill seeks to strengthen the role of the Inter-Agency Task Force on the Verde Island Passage in coordinating efforts by concerned government units in the protection, conservation, and sustainable use of the biological diversity of the Verde Island Passage. It aims to sustain the recent gains of host communities in managing marine protected areas, thus ensuring that these communities will continue to exercise a “sense of ownership” and “spirit of volunteerism” in conservation efforts<sup>4</sup>.

In view of the foregoing, the passage of this bill is earnestly sought.



**LOREN LEGARDA**  
Senator

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<sup>4</sup> The 1991 Baliangao Marine Sanctuary (BMS) in Misamis Occidental serves as a cautionary tale of the perils of changing management of marine protected areas to the national government from the small, community-based management schemes. Originally managed by the local government and non-government organizations, the BMS was turned into a National Integrated Protected Areas System (NIPAS) site in 2000, effectively turning over management to the Protected Area Management Board (PAMB) led by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources. This reduced the sense of ownership of the host community over the project and reduce the incentive for community spirit in managing the BMS. By 2005, the PAMB was unable to stop fishing violations within the “no-take” marine sanctuary. (See Asuncion Bina-de Guzman (2010) Marine Protected Areas in the Philippines: Enhancing Marine Biodiversity, Environmental Governance, and Community Participation in Integrated Coastal Management”. International Symposium on Integrated Coastal Management for Marine Biodiversity in Asia, 14-15 January, Kyoto, Japan)

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*Be it enacted by the Senate and the House of Representatives of the Philippines in the Congress assembled:*

1 **SECTION 1.** Short Title. – This Act shall be known as the “Verde Island  
2 Passage Inter-Agency Task Force Act of 2011”.

3  
4  
5 **SEC 2. Declaration of Policy.** – It is hereby declared the policy of the State  
6 to protect and conserve its ecology and natural resources in relation with  
7 the promotion of a robust and sustainable eco-tourism industry.

8  
9 Pursuant to this policy and in consultation with the local government units  
10 (LGUs) concerned, certain portions of the Verde Island Passage Marine  
11 Corridor may be declared as Marine Protected Area and Eco-Tourism Zone.  
12 As such, the government thru the Inter-Agency Task Force on the Verde  
13 Island Passage shall formulate policies, rules and regulations that will  
14 ensure the protection and conservation of the ecosystem, environmental and  
15 marine life and resources of the Verde Island Passage.

16  
17 Consistent with the country’s national development goal of increasing the  
18 country’s share in the global tourism market, and strictly observing the  
19 ecological, environmental, and marine protection and conservation  
20 guidelines that will be formulated by the government over the Verde Island  
21 Passage, consideration must also be given to the formulation, development,  
22 and implementation of programs and strategies that will generate livelihood  
23 and employment opportunities for the poorest of the poor sectors of society  
24 from eco-tourism programs, projects and activities in the Verde Island  
25 Passage eco-tourism zone.

26  
27 **SEC 3. Inter-Agency Task Force.** – An inter-agency task force shall be  
28 established to evaluate, formulate, and develop policies, guidelines, rules  
29 and regulations for the management, development, promotion, protection  
30 and conservation of the Verde Island Passage Marine Protected Area and  
31 Eco-Tourism Zone.

1  
2 The Verde Island Passage Inter-Agency Task Force shall be composed of the  
3 Secretaries, or their duly-appointed representatives, of the Department of  
4 Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), as the lead agency, National  
5 Economic and Development Authority (NEDA), Department of Tourism  
6 (DOT), Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), Department of Labor and  
7 Employment (DOLE). Other members of the Inter-Agency the Provincial  
8 Governor of Batangas, the Provincial Governor of Occidental Mindoro, the  
9 Provincial Governor of Oriental Mindoro, the Provincial Governor of  
10 Marinduque, the Provincial Governor of Romblon,  
11

12 **SEC. 4. Functions of the Inter-Agency Task Force.** – The Verde Island  
13 Passage Inter-Agency Task Force shall have the following responsibilities:  
14

15 (a) Formulate the Verde Island Passage Marine Protected Area and Eco-  
16 Tourism Master Plan;  
17

18 (b) Ensure the implementation by municipalities of coastal resource  
19 management strategies that are climate-change smart and provide sufficient  
20 information for ecosystem monitoring and evaluation;  
21

22 (c) Coordinate with local government units in the establishment of climate-  
23 smart Marine Protected Areas which use adaptive management approaches  
24 in addressing current and future climate change impacts;  
25

26 (d) Provide guidelines and best practices for coastal and foreshore  
27 development planning that take into account the likelihood for increased  
28 storm activity, saltwater intrusion, and other climate change impacts;  
29

30 (e) Initiate partnerships with the private sector and the local government  
31 units concerned on establishing processes for dealing with pollution,  
32 including but not limited to oil spills, thru the Environmental Impact  
33 Assessment System;  
34

35 (f) Work with the municipalities in ensuring the proper zonation of use of  
36 coastal waters to reduce possible conflict in use of resources;  
37

38 (g) Establish an incentive system, together with the private sector, to help  
39 promote best practices in the governance and performance of marine  
40 protected areas.  
41

42  
43 **SEC. 4. Management Plan.** - Within one (1) year from the effectivity of this  
44 Act, there shall be a Verde Island Passage Marine Protected Area and Eco-  
45 Tourism Master Plan to be prepared by the Verde Island Passage Inter-  
46 Agency Task Force in coordination with the local community and various  
47 stakeholders, the Provincial Government of Batangas, the Provincial  
48 Government of Occidental Mindoro, the Provincial Government of Oriental  
49 Mindoro, the Provincial Government of Marinduque, the Provincial  
50 Government of Romblon, with the assistance from the DENR and the  
51 Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources. The said management plan,  
52 shall contain, among others:  
53

54 (a) a period of applicability for ten (10) years subject to periodic review every  
55 three (3) years;  
56

1 (b) goals and objectives of management in support of Section 2 hereof;

2  
3 (c) mechanisms to ensure consultative and participatory decision-making  
4 processes.

5 (d) site management strategy including, but not limited to establishment of  
6 clear and simplified guidelines on the activities that can be allowed within  
7 zones.

8  
9 **SEC. 5. Appropriations.** – The amount necessary to defray the cost for  
10 undertaking the Verde Island Passage Marine Protected Area and Eco-  
11 Tourism Master Plan shall be charged against the current appropriations of  
12 the DENR.

13  
14 Thereafter, such sums as may be necessary for the full implementation of  
15 this Act shall be included in the General Appropriations Act.

16  
17 **SEC. 6. Separability Clause.** – If any provision or part hereof is held invalid  
18 or unconstitutional, the remainder of this Act or the provisions, not  
19 otherwise affected, shall remain valid and subsisting.

20  
21 **SEC. 7. Repealing Clause.** – All laws, decrees, Orders, rules and  
22 regulations or parts thereof inconsistent with this Act are hereby repealed or  
23 modified accordingly.

24  
25 **SEC. 8. Effectivity Clause.** – This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after  
26 its publication in at least two (2) newspapers of general circulation.

27  
28 Approved.