

Comments on House Bill No. 69: An Act Establishing a Framework for Blue Economy, Promoting Stewardship and Sustainable Development of Coastal and Marine Ecosystems and Resources

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1. HB 69 or the Proposed legislation is both timely and much needed. The proposed bill:
 - 1.1. Strengthens maritime governance structure;
 - 1.2. Espouses adherence to local and global policy commitments;
 - 1.3. Pursues Natural capital accounting and apt natural resource management/stewardship);
 - 1.4. Espouses Protection and conservation of coastal and marine resources; and,
 - 1.5. Mainstreams blue economy principles and initiatives in both national and local development plans.

2. HB 69 mandates the crafting of the blue economy framework within 6 months of its passing. A little tweaking of the bill itself can already serve as framework. What is required is the passing of a Blue Economy National Action Plan, detailing strategic options and actionable inputs from both bureaucratic and sectoral partners and stakeholders.

3. Entry points for intervention in priority strategic marine-based and marine-related economic activities may include the following, among others:
 - 3.1. Advancing Marine Transportation to optimize Marine Highway Infrastructure; including enhancing safety protocols and standards;

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- 3.2. Mapping, Exploration & Characterization of the Philippine EEZ;
 - 3.3. Strengthening Resilience of the country's Marine territory (Marine environment, Coasts, & Coastal Communities);
 - 3.4. Expanding Tourism & Recreational opportunities in the country's coasts and seas;
 - 3.5. Promoting Marine -related industries productivity and competitiveness, including food industries;
 - 3.6. Ensuring biodiversity protection and conservation in coasts and marine environments[;
 - 3.7. Managing coastal and ocean pollution, including solid and waste-water discharges, maritime accidents (i.e. oil spills); and, marine plastics and micro plastics; and,
 - 3.8. Improving related policy grounding, enforcement and adjudication.
4. The scope and coverage of blue economy initiatives are broad and encompassing. As such, the constitution of the proposed National Maritime Office must also reflect the required multi-sector technical capacity. The renaming of an existing office will not suffice—HB 69 must espouse the appointment of competent technical personnel in both the Council and Secretariat. Although the proposed National Maritime Council is already multi-discipline by bureaucratic design, the technical personnel of the secretariat (NMO) must be able to effectively and confidently interface with those of stakeholder institutional partners in government and outside.
 5. The proponent may consider an alternative governance structure. Mainstreaming blue economy-related initiatives requires an augmented institutional leadership platform. As it is currently framed, HB 69 espouses ad hoc leadership with the creation of the interagency National Maritime Council and its support agencies. The policy design of HB 69 is similar to that of RA 10121 or the National DRRM Act with the Office of Civil Defense acting as secretariat to NDRRMC (like the National Maritime Office serving as secretariat to the National Maritime Council). But in the sunset review of RA 10121, the need for an augmented leadership structure was flagged. The governance structure and mandate of the National Maritime Office needs to be augmented for it to assume leadership functions instead of just serving as secretariat to an Ad hoc body. For this purpose, a modified

version of the lean but functional organizational constitution of the Climate Change Commission (CCC) may be considered.