

House Bill Nos. 69, 08893, 08816, 08720, 08708, 08669: An Act Establishing a Framework for Blue Economy, Promoting Stewardship and Sustainable Development of Coastal and Marine Ecosystems and Resources

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COMMENTS:

1. House Bills 69, 08893, 08816, 08720, 08708, 08669 or the proposed bills are similar in content and structure. We recommend the crafting of a consolidated and substitute bill incorporating all the features of these House Bills.
2. We note that only HB 08893 mentioned the 1994 National Marine Policy (Chapter III). The NMP is an important policy guidance and its 1994 version and the results of its review (the review was conducted in 2016 by the UP-CIDS with financial assistance from the National Coast Watch Council) should be taken into consideration. It is further suggested that this be made part of the consolidated and substitute bill.
3. The Proposed legislations are both timely and much needed. Once consolidated, they will :
 - 3.1. Strengthen maritime governance structure;
 - 3.2. Espouse adherence to local and global policy commitments;
 - 3.3. Pursue Natural capital accounting and apt natural resource management/stewardship);
 - 3.4. Espouse Protection and conservation of coastal and marine resources; and,

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- 3.5. Mainstream blue economy principles and initiatives in both national and local development plans.
4. The HBs propose the crafting of the blue economy framework within 6 months of their passing. A little tweaking of the HBs (or a consolidated bill) can itself 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. It is proposed that this provision is added in the consolidated bill.
 5. Entry points for intervention in priority strategic marine-based and marine-related economic activities may include the following, among others:
 - 5.1. Advancing Marine Transportation to optimize Marine Highway Infrastructure; including enhancing safety protocols and standards;
 - 5.2. Mapping, Exploration & Characterization of the Philippine EEZ;
 - 5.3. Strengthening Resilience of the country's Marine territory (Marine environment, Coasts, & Coastal Communities);
 - 5.4. Expanding Tourism & Recreational opportunities in the country's coasts and seas;
 - 5.5. Promoting Marine -related industries productivity and competitiveness, including food industries;
 - 5.6. Ensuring biodiversity protection and conservation in coasts and marine environments[;
 - 5.7. Managing coastal and ocean pollution, including solid and waste-water discharges, maritime accidents (i.e. oil spills); and, marine plastics and micro plastics; and,
 - 5.8. Improving related policy grounding, enforcement and adjudication.
 6. All the HBs institutionalized the National Coast Watch Council and the Coast Watch Council Secretariat created under Executive Order 57, series of 2011 (EO 57 s. 2011) by renaming them as the National Maritime Council and the National Maritime Office, respectively, and by expanding the functions and membership of each body. However, there is another body created under EO 57 s. 2011—the National Coast Watch Center—which is taking strategic

guidance and policy guidance from the Council. It is headed by the Philippine Coast Guard. For consistency, we recommend that the substitute bill mention also the policy for the continuing or revised existence of this Center.

7. 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—A consolidated HB 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 assigned technical personnel of the secretariat (NMO) must be able to effectively and confidently interface with those of stakeholder institutional partners in government and outside.

8. The proponent may consider an alternative governance structure. Mainstreaming blue economy-related initiatives requires an augmented institutional leadership platform. As currently framed, the HBs espouse ad hoc leadership with the creation of the interagency National Maritime Council and its support agencies. The policy design of the HBs 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 of the National Maritime Office, given its broad mandate, needs to be augmented for it to be able to assume leadership functions instead of just serving as secretariat to an Ad hoc body.