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PRESS RELEASE

PALAWAN COUNCIL FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT ENDORSES COAL POWER PLANT IN LAST PHILIPPINE COCKATOO STRONGHOLD

Katala Foundation

Despite serious concerns brought forward by the civil society, the affected municipal government, environmental groups and experts, the Palawan Council for Sustainable Development (PCSD) under the chairmanship of Governor Abraham Kahlil Mita endorsed the construction of a 15MW coal-fired power plant in Panacan, Narra, Palawan. The proposed site for the plant is about 100m away from Rasa Island Wildlife Sanctuary which is home for a large number of globally threatened animal and plant species, including the critically endangered Philippine Cockatoo. Since 1998, Katala Foundation (KFI), so called after the local name of the cockatoo, implements a comprehensive conservation project on the island and adjacent mainland, which harbors one quarter of the world population of this extremely rare parrot. Experts of the organization stated that the coal plant would result in cockatoo casualties due to collisions and electrocution at the feeder power lines. Even more seriously, the power plant would block the flight path of the birds foraging area from the mainland to the island, which in turn would result in a reduction of the carrying capacity of Rasa Island for this species, since parent birds could not any more provide their young with sufficient food.

The coal plant was proposed because of fears of a pending power crisis in this province. The Palawan Electric Cooperative, the local power distributor, opened a bid for new power providers in July 2012, which was awarded to DMCI Power Corporation. Before construction of the coal plant can commence the company is obliged to secure clearance from PCSD. The council was established to balance between economic development and the fragile environment of Palawan, which in its entirety was declared a Marine Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO.

Local residents close to the proposed project site dread health risks which would arise as an effect of burning coal. The village predominantly generates income from fishing and thermal pollution from the cooling water outfall would lead to numerous negative effects in the marine ecosystem, notably coral bleaching and likely would result in reduced fish catches. Impurities in coal include heavy metals, like mercury which is known to accumulate in marine food chains and can lead to severe health problems, including to immune, circulatory, digestive and nervous systems. Concerns have also been raised regarding the economic feasibility of the project and its adverse effects on future investments in renewable energies once it is established and operational.

Due to the serious impacts expected from the project, the technical staff of the PCSD, the highest scientific authority in Palawan Province prepared a recommendation consisting of 15 mitigating measures, including relocation of the site, reforestation to compensate for carbon emissions and demand for detailed plans for rehabilitation of the site after decommission of the project. None of these were however considered in the council's decision.

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Concerns regarding the project can be addressed to:
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