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PRESS RELEASE

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

Katala Foundation

Despite serious concerns from 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 Mitra endorsed the construction of a 15MW coal-fired power plant in Panacan, Narra, Palawan. The proposed site for the plant is about a kilometer away from Rasa Island Wildlife Sanctuary which is home of 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 and KFI 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 from the mainland to the island, which in turn would result in a



reduction of the carrying capacity of Rasa Island for the species, since parent birds could not any more provide their young with sufficient food.

Philippine Cockatoo nestlings rely on regular food supply in order to fledge. The proposed coal plant would cut off the flight path of adult birds from the mainland to Rasa.
Photo: Peter Widmann, KFI

The coal plant was proposed because of fears of a pending power crisis in Palawan. The power supply cooperative, Palawan Electric Cooperative (PALECO), had its final bid opened for New Power Providers in July 17, 2012 and the winning bidder, DMCI Power Corporation, signed the Power Supply Agreement with PALECO on July 25, 2012. Before starting construction the company has to secure a clearance from the PCSD, a council established through RA 7611 or the Strategic Environmental Plan for Palawan to balance between economic development and the fragile environment of Palawan which in its entirety was declared a Man-and-Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO.

Local residents close-by 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



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cooling water fall-out would lead to adverse effects in the marine ecosystem, notably coral bleaching and effect fisheries adversely. 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 these serious impacts of the project and the opposition it generated, the technical staff of the PCSD, the highest scientific authority in Palawan Province presented their evaluation and recommendations before the PCSD Environment and Natural Resources Committee headed by former Vice Governor Atty. Dave Ponce de Leon. The recommendations 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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Caption 1: Rasa Island lies in the immediate vicinity of the proposed power plant. It is declared a wildlife sanctuary and is of global importance for conservation due to the high number of threatened flora and fauna present Photo: Peter Widmann, KFI

Only about a thousand Philippine Cockatoos are left in the wild. One quarter of the population is concentrated in Rasa and its surroundings.