

Home > [Newsinfo](#) > [Latest News Stories](#) > [Regions](#) > Conservationists mount signature drive vs coal-fired power plant in Palawan

Conservationists mount signature drive vs coal-fired power plant in Palawan

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1

96

42

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40

PUERTO PRINCESA CITY, Philippines—Conservation groups have mounted a signature campaign to stop a planned construction of a coal-fired power facility beside Rasa Island in southern Palawan, which is considered as the last remaining habitat of the critically endangered Palawan Cockatoo.

"We have already collected 65,000 signatures including people from other countries who are as concerned as we are about saving the Katala (the local name of the Palawan Cockatoo). We are hoping the Palawan Council for Sustainable Development (PCSD) will finally listen to our plea," Indira Widdman of the Katala Foundation said Wednesday in a press conference launching the campaign.

The signature drive is so far directed towards the members of the PCSD, a local regulatory and permitting body which the anti-coal lobbyists have accused of being "unreasonably partial" to the coal plant proponent, the Consunji-led DMCI Powers Corp.

DMCI last year won a contract to supply 15 megawatts of electricity to the Palawan Electric Cooperative and has applied for local permits to set up the plant in the coastal village of Panacan in the municipality of Narra. It needs a Strategic Environmental Plan (SEP) clearance from PCSD before it can apply for an environmental compliance certificate from the Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

Environmentalists however are opposing the coal facility, warning that the plant's choice of location will disrupt the flight path of the Palawan cockatoo from the island of Rasa just about a kilometer away from the pier of the planned coal facility.

"The Palawan cockatoo is facing an extremely high risk of extinction. We hope the PCSD will finally listen," biologist Peter Widdman said.

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