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SENATE
P. S. R. No. 235

RECEIVED BY: 

Introduced by Senator Miriam Defensor Santiago

RESOLUTION
DIRECTING THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND
NATURAL RESOURCES TO CONDUCT AN INQUIRY, IN AID OF LEGISLATION,
ON THE REPORTED NEED TO REVIEW AND RECOMMEND CHANGES IN THE
WATER DISCHARGE PROTOCOL OF DAMS IN THE COUNTRY

WHEREAS, the Constitution, Article 2, Section 16 states: "The State shall protect and advance the right of the people to a balanced and healthful ecology in accord with the rhythm and harmony of nature";

WHEREAS, the 5 October 2010 issue of the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* reported that the Pangasinan Institute for Land and Aquatic Research (PILAR), a non government organization, is concerned that excess flooding due to water spillage from dams may occur again in the event a super typhoon hits the country because officials of the San Roque dam in Pangasinan are retaining the water discharge protocol, which has been used since 2002;

WHEREAS, according to the report, Virgilio Garcia, hydrologist and dam operations manager of National Power Corp. (Napocor), said the spillway gates would be opened under four conditions—when the reservoir elevation reaches 280 meters above sea level (masl), when there is a typhoon, when the water entering the reservoir is 500 cubic meters per second (cms) or more, and when rainfall is 60 millimeters (mm) or more in one day; Garcia clarified that the absence of one of the factors means there will be no release of water;

WHEREAS, Nicanor Melecio, chair of PILAR, claimed that the protocol is reactionary and does not consider the meteorological and hydrological forecast, especially the rainfall duration that normally precedes and follows the passing eye of the storm; the protocol applied by San Roque dam officials does not consider the possibility that rainfall forecast could be more than four days and rainfall density could have been forecasted to rise rapidly from 60 mm per day to 180 mm per day or more;

WHEREAS, in 2009, Melecio questioned the delayed release of the dam's water; according to Melecio and news reports, dam officials waited for the water level to reach 287.65 masl before opening the dam's spillway gates when Pangasinan was hit by Pepeng (international name: Parma), which had been dumping torrential rains even before it made landfall 3 October 2009;

WHEREAS, the San Roque dam catches water released by the Binga and Ambuklao Dams in Benguet province; however, in 2009, Pepeng's rains and excess dam water submerged 36 towns and cities in Pangasinan, 16 of them along the Agno River; the water released from the dam reached 5,072 cms, more than enough to overtop dikes along the Agno River; as a result, the flooding killed 60 people and destroyed about P4 billion worth of property, crops, and fishery;

WHEREAS, Melecio claims that a protocol cannot be one-way; it cannot just be made by the Napocor or San Roque Power Corp. independent of the people who will be affected; he therefore suggests that during typhoons, the dam should start releasing water when its level reaches 275 masl, and that the protocol should allow two releases—one, prior to the typhoon, and the second, as soon as the typhoon comes in;

WHEREAS, the ad hoc committee in the House of Representatives that investigated the flooding in Pangasinan in 2009 recommended the same preemptive release policy suggested by Melecio; according to the committee, once the weather bureau announces that there is a typhoon coming, the dam should start releasing water at a predetermined time before the typhoon arrives;

WHEREAS, the ad hoc committee explained that this protocol would also fix the maximum water release rate of San Roque Dam based on the capacity of the downstream Agno River system, which, according to the Agno Flood Control System, is about 3,850 centimeters;

WHEREAS, based on this report, it is possible that other dam operations in the country suffer from problematic protocols with regard to water discharge during typhoons, which can lead to destructive excess flooding;

WHEREAS, there should be an overall review of water discharge protocols of dams in the country; the legislature should therefore facilitate open discussions on the review of such protocols to ensure that the best possible protocol is applied every time a typhoon strikes;

WHEREFORE, be it hereby resolved by the Philippine Senate, to direct the Senate Committee on environmental and natural resources to conduct an inquiry, in aid of legislation, on the reported need to review and recommend changes in the water discharge protocol of dams in the country.

Adopted,

as: 
MIRIAM DEFENSOR SANTIAGO

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