

PRESS RELEASE

Extreme heat threatens water, power supply nationwide; Water, power companies, government address El Niño impact, prepare for La Niña

MAY 7, 2024, MANILA—Water and power companies started implementing their contingency plans to ensure water security in response to the water and power supply shortage due to El Niño.

In a recent virtual briefing convened by the Philippine Disaster Resilience Foundation (PDRF) for its private sector partners, experts from the water and power sectors shared their plans and strategies for addressing these challenges and what to expect in their service amid El Niño and the onset of La Niña.

Manila Water's initiatives include strict enforcement of allocation protocols, deployment of mobile treatment plants, and continuous monitoring of dam levels. Maynilad, on the other hand, emphasizes innovation with a new treatment plant in Paranaque, while Aboitiz Infra Capital leverages technology with its Smart Water Network to optimize operations and conserve resources.

In preparation for the more severe impact of El Niño outside Manila, Manila Water Ventures Philippines has activated its business continuity plans and is exploring other water sources to ensure the sustainability of water supply and optimize its network operations.

Energy Security

Intense hot weather also affects the power supply. Last April, the National Grid Corporation of the Philippines issued Red and Yellow alerts, indicating insufficient power supply to meet the demand, resulting in rotating brownouts. The unavailability of many power plants is worsening the situation.

Under the Department of Energy (DOE) guidance, the energy sector is also taking proactive measures to address the El Niño impact, particularly in energy security, one of the key concerns of Task Force El Niño.

With a focus on securing energy facilities and minimizing economic losses due to power outages, DOE calls for collaborative efforts between the public and private sectors in the following areas: implement energy efficiency and conservation measures, subscribe to the interruptible load program, adopt on-site renewable energy and install backup power sources, and educate employees on energy-saving behaviors.

DOE also continues to provide relevant energy data to the ENSO online platform—a centralized data repository for El Niño and La Niña, which is being run by Task Force El Niño.

PDRF also launched a similar platform last year—the El Niño Dashboard of Private Sector Initiatives, which summarizes all the private sector efforts in addressing El Niño challenges. It also features reports from government agencies such as the Department of Science and Technology Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (DOST PAGASA), Department of Agriculture (DA), National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council, and Department of Social Welfare and Development, as well as data on effects and damages to plan how the private sector can help affected communities and businesses.

Mitigating the Impact of El Niño; Preparing for La Niña

In March, DOST PAGASA marked the end of the northern monsoon, signaling the onset of the warmer and drier season.

According to the DOST PAGASA El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO) Alert and Warning System, the presence of both El Niño and La Niña phenomena is observed and expected to persist over the next consecutive overlapping 3-month seasons with high certainty. "We have an ongoing El Niño, but we have already issued a La Niña Watch last March 7 since we have observed the development of La Niña," DOST PAGASA Climate Monitoring and Prediction Section Officer-in-Charge Rusy Abastillas said.

As of April 21, PAGASA reported that 75 provinces are experiencing dry spells and drought. Most of these are in Luzon, Visayas, and some parts of northern Mindanao. Abastillas pointed out that the temperature in the country is generally almost way above average, with the highest recorded temperature being 40°C in northern Luzon and 38.2°C in Metro Manila.

Abastillas also shared that El Niño significantly impacts agriculture, food security, water, power, and energy. DA reported that the agricultural damage from El Niño alone has reached PHP 3.94B, with over 70,000 farmers and fisherfolks affected.

As of April 30, one hundred thirty-one (131) areas have declared a State of Calamity due to El Niño, said Joey Villarama, spokesperson for the government's El Niño Task Force.

Albeit weakening, Abastillas said that El Niño and its impact are expected to continue until May and then transition to ENSO-neutral by the April-May-June season. "From June-August to November-January, there is already increasing probability for La Niña in the June-July-August season," she added.

Abastillas also highlighted the implications of these climate patterns, emphasizing historical trends and their foreseeable impact on rainfall patterns and tropical cyclone occurrences.

PAGASA forecasts show that although El Niño is expected to end in June, more than 60 provinces will likely receive below-normal rainfall conditions. By October, when the impact of La Niña is felt, most parts of the country are expected to receive above-normal rainfall conditions. Abastillas explained that historically, pre-developing La Niña is "characterized by below-normal rainfall; therefore, the possibility of a slight delay on the onset of the rainy season is likely with combined effects of the ongoing El Niño."

One of the effects of El Niño is the decrease in the number of tropical cyclones. Last year, there were only 11 tropical cyclones compared to the average of 19-20 annually. This year, 13-16 tropical cyclones are expected, which is still below average.

Given the challenges posed by El Niño, PDRF calls on its private sector partners to coordinate with national and local governments to strengthen its response strategies and mitigate risks. Additionally, as the nation braces for the potential transition to La Niña, PDRF emphasized the importance of informed decision-making and collective action in preparing for the evolving climate conditions.

"It's against that backdrop that we hold this briefing today. Our hope is that we will gain a genuine understanding of the issues that confront us and that we act and prepare for short-term struggles and our long-term concerns," said PDRF President Rene Meily.

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Philippine Disaster Resilience Foundation
2nd Floor, Employee Service Building, Meralco Compound
Ortigas Avenue, Pasig City, 1600 Philippines
Telephone: (02) 8844-2700 | Website: www.pdrf.org

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Media Contact:

Isabel Almenteros-Maravilles

Senior Communications Officer
Philippine Disaster Resilience Foundation
E: malmenteros@pdrf.org.ph

PDRF-IMU-PR-01-00