



## NEWS ROUNDUP

13 MAY 2026 | 08:00 am

---

- As El Niño Approaches, Scientists Predict Fierce Heatwaves, Wildfires and Floods
- Finance chief: EU-Philippines free trade pact seen in Q3
- Holy See: Wars and extreme climate events have lethal impact on food systems
- Local communities to lead climate actions
- Long dubbed a 'climate refuge,' warming Tasmanian forests need our help
- Eight years of impact: Manila Bulletin Environment and Sustainability section continues its "Beyond Green" dialogue
- Manila Water building P450-million Antipolo pipeline to boost Rizal water supply

### CCC IN THE NEWS:

- 'Financing gap' stifles climate policy
- EU envoy: Asean climate goals need stronger financing support
- CCC pushes for action-driven and results-oriented climate approach
- CCC, Netherlands search ways to push nature-based solutions

### INSIDE CLIMATE NEWS

#### [As El Niño Approaches, Scientists Predict Fierce Heatwaves, Wildfires and Floods](#)

By: Bob Berwyn

Emerging Pacific Ocean heat, combined with ongoing human-caused global warming, is a grim recipe for deadly climate extremes. Heat alone already kills more than 500,000 annually.

### MANILA BULLETIN

#### [Eight years of impact: Manila Bulletin Environment and Sustainability section continues its "Beyond Green" dialogue](#)

The signs of environmental strain are no longer distant warnings but present realities. The Philippines, given its geography and vulnerability, feels these pressures in increasingly tangible ways. These are precarious times that call for more than awareness, requiring a shift in how we live and engage with everyday systems of consumption and production.

## **MANILA STANDARD**

### **[Finance chief: EU-Philippines free trade pact seen in Q3](#)**

By: Nash B. Maulana

A free trade agreement between the European Union and the Philippines is expected to be signed in the third quarter of the year, a move seen to “strengthen trade, unlock new opportunities for exporters, and deepen economic partnership with the EU,” Finance Secretary Frederick Go said.

### **[Local communities to lead climate actions](#)**

The Philippines is reinforcing its program to tap communities in leading the fight against climate change, biodiversity conservation and sustainable livelihoods

### **[Manila Water building P450-million Antipolo pipeline to boost Rizal water supply](#)**

Manila Water Company said it is investing in long-term infrastructure to reinforce water security across its east zone concession to combat climate variability and recurring dry-season challenges.

## **MONGABAY**

### **[Long dubbed a ‘climate refuge,’ warming Tasmanian forests need our help](#)**

By: Stefan Lovgren

TASMANIA, Australia — A shaded creek winds through fern forest along the Lilydale Falls Trail in northern Tasmania. As hikers pass by, researcher Todd Walsh reaches into the slow-moving water and beneath a rock to pull out a juvenile giant freshwater crayfish caught in one of his live traps.

## **VATICAN NEWS**

### **[Holy See: Wars and extreme climate events have lethal impact on food systems](#)**

By: Devin Watkins

The Holy See laments the impact of war, recessions, climate events, and political instability on the world’s agrifood systems, calling for local food systems to keep human dignity at their center.

## CCC IN THE NEWS:

### BUSINESS MIRROR

#### [‘Financing gap’ stifles climate policy](#)

By: Rizal Raoul Reyes

IN a direct call to action at the inaugural Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean)-European Union (EU) Sustainability Summit, key diplomatic and strategic leaders warned that the transition from climate policy to local impact is being stifled by a critical “financing gap.”

### PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

#### [EU envoy: Asean climate goals need stronger financing support](#)

By: Isabelle Pechay

MANILA, Philippines — Southeast Asia’s climate ambitions may fall short without stronger financing support and more concrete implementation mechanisms, European Union (EU) Ambassador to the Philippines Massimo Santoro said on Wednesday.

### PHILIPPINE INFORMATION AGENCY

#### [CCC pushes for action-driven and results-oriented climate approach](#)

At the ASEAN-EU Sustainability Summit 2026, the Climate Change Commission (CCC) underscores the need to shift ASEAN–EU climate cooperation from policy alignment to implementation, emphasizing the urgency of delivering concrete, measurable results on the ground.

### MANILA STANDARD

#### [CCC, Netherlands search ways to push nature-based solutions](#)

The Climate Change Commission (CCC) and the Netherlands led by Ambassador Marielle Geraedts are exploring ways to advance nature-based solutions (NBS) as a key strategy for climate change adaptation and mitigation.

**Information and Knowledge Management Division**

## INSIDE CLIMATE NEWS

### [As El Niño Approaches, Scientists Predict Fierce Heatwaves, Wildfires and Floods](#)

By: Bob Berwyn

Emerging Pacific Ocean heat, combined with ongoing human-caused global warming, is a grim recipe for deadly climate extremes. Heat alone already kills more than 500,000 annually.

Scientists said this week that a developing El Niño is likely to amplify heatwaves, droughts and floods this year, but warned that the long-term warming caused by burning fossil fuels remains the main driver of climate extremes.

El Niño is the warm phase of a semi-regular temperature oscillation in the tropical Pacific Ocean, during which massive amounts of heat stored in the ocean are released into the atmosphere, temporarily raising the average annual global surface temperature by as much as 0.3 degrees Fahrenheit.

During an online briefing this week, researchers said that the consequences of a moderate or strong El Niño today are more damaging than those of similar events just a few decades ago because the entire global climate system is now substantially warmer.

If the projected El Niño emerges on top of that warmer climate, there is a “serious risk of unprecedented weather extremes” that would not have happened during similar historical El Niños, said Fredi Otto, a professor in climate science at Imperial College London and a lead researcher with World Weather Attribution, a research group assessing how global warming affects climate extremes.

El Niño conditions in 2015-2016 and 2023-2024 helped boost Earth’s long-running fever to new records; climatologists expect another spike in the months ahead. But the planet’s temperature will keep reaching new record highs in any case “because of human-induced climate change,” Otto said during the press conference.

World Weather Attribution has assessed the effects of global warming on more than 100 extreme climate events since 2014. Often, she said, those studies try to isolate El Niño’s role in a particular extreme event to accurately measure the effect of human-caused warming.

In almost every case, the WWA researchers found “human-induced climate change has a much greater influence on the likelihood and intensity of extreme weather events” than El Niño cycles, she said. One of their assessments showed that human-caused warming “far eclipsed” the effects of a strong El Niño on extreme rains in the Horn of Africa at the end of 2023.

Jemilah Mahmood, director of the Sunway Centre for Planetary Health at Sunway University in Indonesia, said during the press conference that the scientific projections for serious climate

impacts from a combination of long-term warming and El Niño this year can be measured in terms of life and death, especially regarding extreme heat.

“Heat is exactly the kind of crisis that our systems are designed to ignore until it’s too late,” Mahmood said.

“It doesn’t arrive with a named storm or a visible floodline. It kills quietly, in homes, in open fields, in the bodies of workers who have no choice but to be outside,” she said, tallying grim statistics like the estimated 546,000 total annual heat-related global deaths.

“We have normalized a public health emergency by failing to name it as one,” she said. “Those who contributed the least to this crisis are often those paying the highest health costs, but that is the equity scandal at the heart of everything we are discussing today.”

#### “Severe Year” for Wildfires

Hotspots at the confluence of El Niño-driven droughts and ongoing planetary heating are expected in wildfire-prone regions, including the Amazon, Canada, the western United States and Australia, the researchers said during the briefing.

Theodore Keeping, a wildfire researcher at the University of Reading in England, said firefighters in those regions are bracing for a severe year, potentially facing some of the most damaging fire conditions seen in recent history. He noted that the combination of El Niño on top of ongoing warming has driven a “whiplash” between extreme moisture and extreme drought in some regions. Grasses and brush thrive during heavy rains, then dry out quickly when the heat returns, turning into combustible fuel.

This year, Keeping said, wildfires on several continents have already scorched an Alaska-sized area of land—more than half a million square miles—50 percent more than average over the past 25 years. Almost all countries in West Africa and the Sahel region of North-Central Africa experienced record-breaking wildfires, he added.

But wildfire season is only beginning in many parts of the world, so with “this rapid start, in combination with the forecast El Niño ... we’re looking at a particularly severe year materializing,” he said.

Big fires that burned in “normally lush regions” of East Asia, including Myanmar, Thailand and Laos, were associated with severe droughts that were, in turn, linked with human-caused climate change, he said. Scientists know that ecosystems are drying more rapidly during periods of low rainfall due to warming, he said, adding that “these fires are of particular concern, given how populated the region is.”

Keeping said that a strong El Niño “can have a major effect on wildfire risk” appearing later this year, which could increase the likelihood of severe hot and dry conditions in Australia, as well as the northwestern U.S. and Canada, and the Amazon rainforest.

Even if El Niño leads to “very extreme conditions later this year, it’s not a reason to freak out,” Otto said. “It comes and goes. Climate change, by contrast, gets worse and worse and worse as long as we do not stop burning fossil fuels. So climate change is the reason to freak out.”

A constructive response, she said, is within reach, “because we do know what to do about it. We have the knowledge and the technology to go very, very far away from using fossil fuels.”

## MANILA BULLETIN

### [Eight years of impact: Manila Bulletin Environment and Sustainability section continues its "Beyond Green" dialogue](#)

The signs of environmental strain are no longer distant warnings but present realities. The Philippines, given its geography and vulnerability, feels these pressures in increasingly tangible ways. These are precarious times that call for more than awareness, requiring a shift in how we live and engage with everyday systems of consumption and production.

When we speak of collective responsibility, it extends across the entire chain, from policymakers and business leaders to manufacturers, consumers, and those involved in waste management and recovery. Sustainability is no longer a separate conversation but one that must be embedded in every layer of decision-making.

This is where the work of the Manila Bulletin's Environment and Sustainability section becomes especially relevant. Over the years, it has evolved into a comprehensive resource that touches on all aspects of sustainability, from corporate responsibility to individual action. It highlights groundbreaking innovations in renewable energy, eco-friendly technologies, and sustainable business practices, while also shining a light on the tireless efforts of communities and organizations working to create a greener, more equitable world.

The section has featured a diverse range of stories—from local initiatives to global movements—showcasing how individuals and industries are rising to meet the challenges of climate change and environmental degradation. This year, as with past years, the section has offered readers practical advice, timely news, and thought-provoking insights that empower them to make informed choices about sustainability in their everyday lives.

Anchored in the broader idea of going “beyond green,” its reporting reflects a long-term view of sustainability, one that considers environmental protection alongside social equity and governance.

It is true that several Filipino companies have started laying the foundation for Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) compliance, but they represent only a small fraction. To make a real impact, this needs to become a broader movement.

Going beyond green is more than just an environmental movement, it is greater than one simple effort as it challenges individuals to think beyond the current definitions of sustainability and inspires people to create a future where avoiding harm is not just the priority but actively enhancing the world around us.

Part of this continued effort is the annual Manila Bulletin Sustainability Forum, which brings together industry leaders and sustainability champions in conversation with the youth. Now on its fifth edition, the forum will be held on April 30, 2026, at the University of Santo Tomas, where

organizations will share insights on their initiatives under the theme, “Uplifting Communities: Sustainability in Action.”

In this way, the publication extends beyond the page, creating spaces for dialogue that connect ideas with action. Each issue becomes not just a source of information, but part of a broader effort to document, inform, and encourage systems that can sustain both people and the planet over time.

## MANILA STANDARD

### [Finance chief: EU-Philippines free trade pact seen in Q3](#)

By: Nash B. Maulana

A free trade agreement between the European Union and the Philippines is expected to be signed in the third quarter of the year, a move seen to “strengthen trade, unlock new opportunities for exporters, and deepen economic partnership with the EU,” Finance Secretary Frederick Go said.

Go said the bilateral pact, which he described as the Philippines’ “most important economic agreement this year,” is currently under negotiation.

“It is a much-awaited milestone that will strengthen trade, unlock new opportunities for exporters, and deepen our economic partnership with the EU,” he said.

The planned agreement stemmed from discussions during the ASEAN-EU Sustainability Summit 2026 held in Cebu City on May 7. Go said both parties are targeting the signing of the agreement in Q3 2026.

Philippine and EU leaders said the region needed to bridge the “gap between policy ambition and implementation.”

Go met with EU Ambassador to the Philippines Massimo Santoro, Indonesian Deputy Minister for National Development Planning Leonardo Teguh Sambodo, and Climate Change Commission Vice Chairperson and Executive Director Secretary Robert Borje.

Speaking on the energy crisis, Borje said: “What can be seen right now as a challenge can be turned into an opportunity – an opportunity not just for investments to come into the Philippines, but an opportunity that provides co-benefits as we work towards a greener future and greener sources of energy.”

On climate change issues, Santoro said: “While we are rightly ambitious in setting our targets for climate and environmental action, we do not always synchronize the financial resources needed to implement that ambition.”

Santoro said strengthening the “link between ambition and financing is essential to turning policy into real, on-the-ground impact.”

He added that “there should be no silos between cooperation on trade, climate and disaster risk reduction, as these are interconnected challenges.”

“The current energy situation must become an opportunity to accelerate this integrated approach, including on renewable energy and economic resilience,” Santoro said.

The ASEAN-EU Sustainability Summit 2026 was held on the sidelines of the ASEAN Leaders' Summit as its inaugural gathering, drawing more than 200 high-level participants, including ministers, ambassadors, and senior industry executives, according to the EU Mission to the Philippines.

Officials who delivered video messages at the summit included ASEAN Secretary-General Kao Kim Hourn, European Commissioner for International Partnerships Jozef Sikela, and EU Ambassador to ASEAN Sujiro Seam, all of whom called for accelerated progress and stronger collaboration on sustainable action.

Paulo Duarte, president of the European Chamber of Commerce of the Philippines, said that “at a time of global uncertainty marked by energy volatility, supply chain disruptions, and rising costs, the Summit could not be more timely.”

Duarte, who also sits on the executive board of the EU-ASEAN Business Council, said: “It reflects a shared recognition across the region that sustainability is no longer optional. It is central to economic resilience, competitiveness, and long-term growth.”

“Europe and the Philippines have a stable and evolving partnership, built on trade, investment and development cooperation. Today, it is also focused on sustainability, climate and inclusive growth, and we remain committed to deepening our collaboration with the EU and advancing our shared priorities together,” Go said.

## Local communities to lead climate actions

The Philippines is reinforcing its program to tap communities in leading the fight against climate change, biodiversity conservation and sustainable livelihoods

The United Nations Development Program (UNDP), along with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and partners, officially launched the Eighth Operational Phase of the Global Environment Facility Small Grants Program (SGP8).

The Small Grants Program for over three decades has demonstrated the transformative role of communities, especially Indigenous Peoples, women, youth, farmers and fisherfolk, in driving sustainable development.

Since 1992, SGP Philippines has supported grassroots initiatives that protect ecosystems, strengthen livelihoods and build resilience to climate and disaster risks.

The program places communities at the center of decision-making, ensuring inclusive participation and stronger local ownership of development solutions.

The launch was marked by the ceremonial signing of the Responsible Party Agreement between UNDP and the Forest Foundation Philippines, which will lead the implementation of SGP8 in the country.

SGP8 builds on its gains by adopting a more integrated landscape and seascape approach, linking ecosystem protection with livelihoods and governance.

“The Small Grants Program (SGP) demonstrates what effective, community led partnerships can achieve. SGP OP8 will strengthen community voice through inclusive governance, protects ecosystems, and helps finance reach the beneficiaries in predictable, flexible ways,” said Christophe Bahuet, UNDP Resident Representative in the Philippines.

“With support from the Global Environment Facility (GEF), UNDP and the Forest Foundation Philippines will bring positive changes to the communities,” he said.

SGP8 will focus on scaling up proven solutions such as biodiversity-friendly enterprises, nature-based approaches, clean energy and sustainable food systems, while strengthening linkages to policies, financing, and markets to ensure long-term impact.

The program will continue to leverage multi-stakeholder platforms, including Landscape and Seascape Round Tables, to promote collaboration among government, civil society and the private sector.

This approach aims to strengthen coordination, enhance knowledge sharing, and ensure that community voices shape decision-making processes.

The launch also convened representatives from national government agencies, local governments, civil society organizations and community groups, reflecting a whole-of-society approach to addressing the country's most pressing environmental challenges.

As climate change, biodiversity loss, and environmental degradation intensify, SGP8 positions the Philippines to further scale locally driven solutions that contribute to national and global sustainable development goals.

[Manila Water building P450-million Antipolo pipeline to boost Rizal water supply](#)

Manila Water Company said it is investing in long-term infrastructure to reinforce water security across its east zone concession to combat climate variability and recurring dry-season challenges.

The company said it is developing the P450-million Antipolo Pipeline Package 1, a transmission project designed to support future supply requirements and system resilience in Rizal province.

The facility spans more than 9 kilometers from the Boso-Boso Reservoir to Teresa, Rizal. It will serve as a raw water transmission line for the planned Pasig Water Treatment Plant.

The project includes pipe laying, tunneling, asphalt restoration and the construction of a pipe bridge. While the pipeline will remain inactive until complementary distribution lines are commissioned, Manila Water officials said building transmission assets ahead of time allows for the efficient integration of future water sources.

“We are building infrastructure today with the next decades in mind. Investing early in transmission assets allows us to future-proof our system, improve reliability and ensure readiness as new water sources come online and climate pressures continue to intensify,” Manila Water corporate communication affairs group director Jeric Sevilla said.

The initiative is part of a broader plan to strengthen the network against future El Nino events. By expanding conveyance capacity, the utility provider aims to manage resources more effectively under increasingly unpredictable climate conditions.

Manila Water said it is enforcing strict traffic management and safety measures to minimize disruptions for local communities during construction. The company reaffirmed its commitment to long-term investments that support sustainable growth and service reliability as environmental challenges become more frequent.

## Long dubbed a 'climate refuge,' warming Tasmanian forests need our help

By: Stefan Lovgren

TASMANIA, Australia — A shaded creek winds through fern forest along the Lilydale Falls Trail in northern Tasmania. As hikers pass by, researcher Todd Walsh reaches into the slow-moving water and beneath a rock to pull out a juvenile giant freshwater crayfish caught in one of his live traps.

In streams like this one, he says, present day temperatures rarely climb above about 21° Celsius (69.8° Fahrenheit). “The lethal temperature seems to be about 23°[C, or 73.4°F] for these guys,” says Walsh, an independent crayfish expert who has studied the animals for decades and is known locally as the “Lobster Man.”

Walsh says he has encountered a few other Tasmanian creeks reaching 25-26°C (77-78.8°F), which would exceed the species' apparent thermal limits, and he hasn't found any crayfish in those streams.

The Tasmanian giant freshwater crayfish (*Astacopsis gouldi*), also dubbed the giant freshwater lobster (even though it's not a lobster), is the largest freshwater invertebrate on Earth, capable of growing up to a meter long (more than 3 feet) and living for decades.

It occurs only in northern Tasmania's cool, forested river watersheds — habitat that has remained colder and wetter than much of mainland Australia, which has significantly warmed and dried. Buffered by the island's maritime climate and intact forests, Tasmania's waterways allow the crayfish and other unique species to persist, making this Australian state a classic example of what scientists call a “climate refuge.”

A climate refuge, or refugia, is a place where local conditions — temperature, moisture or topography — shield ecosystems from rapid warming, allowing species to live on, even as surrounding landscapes may become less hospitable.

Scientists have identified thousands of such refuges worldwide, from small, sheltered valleys to entire mountain ranges and coastlines. But some stand out for their large scale and ecological significance — places like Tasmania, Chilean Patagonia, and parts of the Canadian Pacific Northwest, where ocean influence, natural terrain, or both combine to slow climate change across entire regions.

But in recent years, the idea of climate refuges has become more complex and nuanced, as new climate and biodiversity data have helped scientists refine the concept. Importantly, temperature alone no longer defines a refuge. Climate change is also altering rainfall patterns, intensifying floods and droughts, reducing oxygen in waterways, and reshaping the habitats that species depend on. Refuges may buffer some climate pressures, says Toni Lyn Morelli, a

research ecologist with the U.S. Geological Survey, but “that doesn’t mean they are immune to other environmental stressors.”

The resilience of climate refuges can also be weakened by a range of human activities, resulting in decreased biome resilience, including degradation and transgression of planetary boundaries such as land-use change (deforestation and conversion to agriculture, among others), various forms of pollution from mining, industry and agriculture, and more.

Tasmania presents an example of how these complex pressures interact and play out. Even as temperatures remain relatively cool here, other forces are reshaping ecosystems. In some watersheds, logging and land disturbance have reduced forest shade and increased sediment in streams, while shifts in rainfall and river flows are altering habitats that cold-water species depend on.

Researchers are increasingly documenting these changes across systems once thought to be well-buffered from climate stress. These combined stressors may determine whether places like Tasmania, long considered refuges, can continue to function that way.

“There’s definitely more attention being given to factors like changes in rainfall, fire regimes, and how those interact with land use patterns,” says Karel Mokany, a biodiversity modeler with CSIRO, Australia’s national science agency in Canberra.

## Devils and skates

Tasmania carries the aura of a faraway wilderness. The island lies 240 kilometers (150 miles) south of the Australian mainland, and is a place many people struggle to place on a map. Flights arrive steadily in Hobart, the state capital, but beyond the airport the landscape quickly empties out. Roads wind into mountains cloaked with temperate rainforest, and vast national parks dominate the interior. From high lookouts the island unfolds as a sweep of forests, lakes and a rugged coastline that remains remarkably intact.

These landscapes have preserved ecological conditions lost across much of mainland Australia. Cold rivers run through forests of ancient lineages tracing back to Gondwana, the southern supercontinent that once joined Australia with Antarctica, South America, Africa and India. Gondwana began breaking up roughly 200 million years ago in the early Jurassic, with the Tasmanian Passage that separates Australia from Tasmania forming about 30 million to 40 million years ago. This isolation resulted in unique fragments of ancient ecosystems surviving and evolving here, allowing for an unusually high number of endemic species to persist.

The most famous is the Tasmanian devil (*Sarcophilus harrisii*), the world’s largest carnivorous marsupial. Other endemic species include the forty-spotted pardalote (*Pardalotus quadragintus*), one of Australia’s rarest birds; the grassland-dwelling Ptunarra brown butterfly (*Oreixenica ptunarra*); and the Huon pine (*Lagarostrobos franklinii*), a conifer that can live for thousands of years.

In the island's remote southwest, Macquarie Harbour is home to the Maugean skate (*Zearaja maugeana*), a fish that is unusual for its extreme specialization. The skate lives in the harbor's dark, stratified waters, where tannin-stained freshwater sits atop saltier ocean water, creating low-light, low-oxygen conditions more typical of much deeper marine environments.

But the very ecosystems that long sheltered and nurtured these species are changing. In Macquarie Harbour, historic mining pollution and expanding salmon aquaculture have altered water chemistry and depleted oxygen levels, placing the skate at risk. On land, the Tasmanian devils have been devastated by the contagious devil facial tumor disease, forcing conservation programs to scramble to intervene as climate begins shifting dramatically, habitat pressures grow, and diseases reshape and destabilize the island's once-resilient refuges.

Back at Lilydale creek, the stressors on Tasmania's refuge come into focus on a small scale. The giant freshwater crayfish depends on cold, shaded streams where cobbles and boulders create gaps along the riverbed, spaces juveniles use to shelter from predators and strong water flows.

Those spaces can gradually disappear when fine sediment washes into streams and settles between rocks, filling crevices that young crayfish depend on for safety. The sources of that sediment are varied, including forestry, agriculture and road construction that carries disturbed soils into waterways.

The crayfish "are very sensitive to sediment," says Lauren Bird, an aquatic ecologist with NRM North, a government-funded natural resource management group in northern Tasmania, who joined Walsh at the creek. "Once those fine sediments get into the spaces between the rocks, the habitat basically disappears."

The effects can be hard to spot at first. Adult crayfish may still be present, but the next generation is going missing. With slow growth and relatively few young reaching maturity, populations depend on a steady supply of juveniles. "You might find a big old male and think the creek's in good condition," Bird says. "But there's no one following behind."

#### Increased strain in a changing world

Beyond Tasmania, similar refuges appear across a wide range of landscapes. Their boundaries are often fluid, but they share a common role: buffering ecosystems from climate extremes and allowing species to persist as change unfolds more slowly than in surrounding areas.

In the Andes and Patagonia, cold air pooling at high elevations creates cooler microclimates. In parts of New Zealand and along the coasts of South America, ocean influence slows the pace of warming. In eastern North America, the heavily forested Appalachian Mountains harbor moist, shaded valleys that shelter cold-adapted species like the Southern Appalachian brook trout (*Salvelinus fontinalis*), though today this fish is at risk from intensifying heat and storms, like 2025's Hurricane Helene.

Recent research suggests some refuges may be even more resilient than expected, but only under certain conditions. In the Amazon, studies have found that up to a third of forests may retain higher moisture levels during extreme drought due to local wetland soils and topography, providing enhanced resistance to climate change. In Colombia, newly mapped lowland peatlands store vast amounts of carbon while maintaining waterlogged conditions that can buffer ecosystems against climate change-induced drought.

But evidence from around the world also points to growing climate strain. Mountain refuges are shrinking as snowpack declines and species are pushed upslope. Cold-water rivers are warming and losing oxygen as flows change. Forest refuges are experiencing more frequent drought and disturbance. Even where temperatures rise more slowly, other pressures erode the conditions that make these places function as refuges.

“Some refugia are indeed likely becoming less effective for some species or systems while others are likely still serving as effective refugia,” says Joshua Lawler, a climate change ecologist at the University of Washington in the U.S. “Refugia aren’t permanent features on the landscape, but instead should be seen as temporary refuges.”

How long a refuge persists, Lawler adds, depends on how quickly conditions change and on the needs of the species themselves, meaning that some may endure for decades or longer, while others fade far more quickly.

What’s clear is that humanity will need to act if refuges are to remain resilient for longer. But the world has so far fallen short on action. A 2025 meta-study analyzing 634 refuge-focused papers found that, “Over the last 5 years, the field of climate-change refugia conservation has made exciting advances, shifting from concepts and theory to refugia mapping and implementation. However, few studies have advanced to action on the ground; while 84% of studies identified and mapped refugia, only 4% involved implementing management action.”

The lion’s share of those refuge studies were also conducted in the world’s wealthiest regions: the U.S. and Europe, followed by Asia, with Africa, Latin America and Australia (which hold vast troves of unique biodiversity) trailing far behind.

### Managing the change

Forests play a key role in maintaining climate refuges because their vegetation moderates temperature, retains moisture and stabilizes soils. Tasmania has long been viewed as one of these forest refuges. Much of the island remains heavily wooded, and its mountains and maritime climate have allowed ancient plant lineages to persist long after they disappeared from mainland Australia.

But many of those species survive precisely because conditions have remained cool and wet. “Most of the Tasmanian rainforest endemics are outliers in physiological characteristics of drought sensitivity,” notes Tim Brodribb, a plant physiologist at the University of Tasmania. “These species have vascular systems that become damaged easily by drought.”

As a result, he says, such species are restricted to wetter parts of the island and somewhat protected by topography from fire. But those conditions may now be shifting. “The west coast [of Tasmania] is becoming drier due to weakening westerlies,” Brodribb says. “This is a bad trend. We’re seeing significant erosion of our refugial forests due to fire, and dry or hot weather causing crown dieback.”

As conditions shift, researchers’ ideas about climate refuges are also changing. Rather than places that simply need to be left alone, they are increasingly seen as landscapes where key ecological processes — intact forests, connected rivers and controlled land use — must be maintained. In many areas, those systems are already under strain, even as climate change adds further pressures, prompting conservation shifts from protection alone to active management.

In northern Tasmania, that work has long been underway in the catchments feeding the kanamaluka/Tamar estuary. Michael Murunga, an environmental scientist with NRM North, works with the Tamar Estuary and Esk Rivers (TEER) program, which has monitored water quality and ecosystem health in the region for more than two decades, one of the longest continuous data sets in this Australian state. The estuary supports wetlands, seagrass beds and migratory shorebirds, and its condition reflects land use across the upstream landscape, from farms and forests to towns and roads.

Restoration efforts focus on reconnecting rivers to floodplains, reversing past modifications to waterways, rehabilitating wetlands and reducing sediment and nutrient runoff from farms and infrastructure. In recent years, roughly A\$140 million (about US\$100 million) has been invested in enhancing the catchment through a mix of state, federal and local programs, funding wastewater upgrades, riparian restoration, and fencing to keep livestock out of streams. “The movement of fresh surface and groundwaters through the landscape supports ecological, economic, and social values,” Murunga says.

Such efforts are part of a wider, but somewhat uneven, conservation response across Tasmania. Large protected areas cover much of the island, including the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area. But outside those zones, land pressures remain significant. Researchers say maintaining Tasmania’s role as a climate refuge will require more coordinated, landscape-scale planning, particularly to protect freshwater systems and reduce cumulative impacts from forestry and agriculture.

That approach also applies globally: No ecosystem is immune to the impacts of climate change, researchers say, meaning that human action — ranging from decarbonization to forest protection and other forms of active management — are needed to maintain refuges.

“Tasmania will certainly continue to act as a refuge for many species into the future,” says Mokany, the biodiversity modeler. “But landscape management and conservation actions will have an important role in influencing the degree to which it can successfully act as a place biodiversity can retreat to, and persist within, under ongoing climate change.”

## VATICAN NEWS

### [Holy See: Wars and extreme climate events have lethal impact on food systems](#)

By: Devin Watkins

The Holy See laments the impact of war, recessions, climate events, and political instability on the world's agrifood systems, calling for local food systems to keep human dignity at their center.

Msgr. Fernando Chica Arellano, Permanent Observer to the FAO, IFAD, and WFP, has expressed the Holy See's call for resilience in agrifood systems, which have seen significant disruption in recent years.

He spoke on Tuesday at the 35th Session of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization's regional conference for Europe, held in Dushanbe, Tajikistan.

Msgr. Chica Arellano expressed support for the conference's goal of promoting agrifood systems, so that no one may lack the food that "enables them to lead a serene and full life."

He upheld the importance of concrete actions to foster food security in the wake of recent global crises.

"The combination of merciless wars, economic recessions, extreme climate events, political instability, and market volatility has given rise to a lethal combination for the world's food systems," he said.

In recent years, several conflicts have disrupted global food markets, including the Russia-Ukraine war that disrupted grain exports and fertilizer supplies, as well as the ongoing Iran-US war that has already pushed up the prices of fuel and fertilizer.

Other conflicts have caused catastrophic disruption to local food systems, such as the war in Sudan, which has led to severe food shortages in major cities and a spike in acute hunger.

In his address, Msgr. Chica Arellano called on nations to combat this "very negative trend" by coordinating interventions so that countries can walk together "in fraternal harmony."

The overarching goal, he said, is for all people to have stable and permanent access to sufficient, nutritious, and safe food.

The Holy See's Permanent Observer called for European countries to implement legal frameworks to move toward food models that integrate "social justice, environmental sustainability, and respect for the human person as guiding principles of all public and private action."

Building resilience into the world's agrifood systems is among the most urgent priorities of our time, he said.

Rather than employing the same production methods, Msgr. Chica Arellano called for the way food is produced to be transformed, moving away from greedy exploitation to increased investment in the most vulnerable and forgotten rural areas.

"The agricultural sector," he said, "should be supported by wise economic and political decisions, enabling young people to devote themselves enthusiastically to agriculture and not to abandon the countryside in discouragement in order to migrate to the cities."

Finally, Msgr. Chica Arellano said agrifood production must keep the dignity of the human person at the center, meet food needs without compromising the future, and promote decent work at the local level.

## CCC IN THE NEWS:

### BUSINESS MIRROR

#### [‘Financing gap’ stifles climate policy](#)

By: Rizal Raoul Reyes

In a direct call to action at the inaugural Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean)-European Union (EU) Sustainability Summit, key diplomatic and strategic leaders warned that the transition from climate policy to local impact is being stifled by a critical “financing gap.”

European Union Ambassador to the Philippines Massimo Santoro and Stratbase ADR Institute President Victor Andres Manhit led the push for a more integrated, private-sector-driven approach to sustainability, arguing that legislative frameworks are meaningless without the capital to fuel them.

Santoro highlighted a growing disconnect between the bold sustainability frameworks established by Southeast Asian governments and the actual resources deployed on the ground.

“There is a pressing need to reinforce the link between the ambition and the financial resources available for that ambition,” Santoro stated.

He warned that without providing local authorities with the “necessary tools and instruments,” even the most well-designed policies risk stalling at the planning stage.

Santoro called for institutional scaling or moving beyond “pilot programs” to large-scale initiatives through partnerships with the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and European financial institutions.

He said the government should join hands with the private sector because it is the only force capable of ensuring the long-term sustainability of climate actions currently initiated at the government level. Further, he described the private sector as the “only one able to guarantee the sustainability of the action which is currently going at government-to-government level.”

Santoro noted that there was a pressing “need to reinforce the link between the ambition and the financial resources available for that ambition,” and that governments and development partners must work closely together to provide local authorities with the “necessary tools [and] necessary instruments to translate the policy framework into concrete action.”

Meanwhile Stratbase President Victor Andres Manhit framed the region’s current “energy emergency” not just as a risk, but as a catalyst for deeper regional integration.

Manhit called for a “forward-looking” cooperation model that transcends traditional state-to-state agreements. By strengthening resilience at both the regional and local levels, he argued that Asean and the EU can create a more robust risk management framework.

“We are in an energy emergency...but though there’s risk, there’s also opportunity to test and improve existing resilience,” Manhit noted, suggesting that the current crisis should serve as a stress test for future cooperation.

Meanwhile, the discussion also touched on the shifting identity of the Asean bloc.

Executive Director Robert Borje of the Philippine Climate Change Commission, noted that as geopolitical tensions tighten global fiscal conditions, Asean must pivot its value proposition.

Borje emphasized that the varying development levels across the 11-member bloc should be viewed as an asset—a diverse “testing ground” for climate adaptation models that could eventually be exported to the rest of the world.

## PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

### [EU envoy: Asean climate goals need stronger financing support](#)

By: Isabelle Pechay

MANILA, Philippines — Southeast Asia’s climate ambitions may fall short without stronger financing support and more concrete implementation mechanisms, European Union (EU) Ambassador to the Philippines Massimo Santoro said on Wednesday.

As Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) and EU leaders gathered in Cebu for the inaugural ASEAN-EU Sustainability Summit, Santoro warned that while policy commitments are in place, these alone would not be enough to address the region’s growing climate vulnerabilities.

Echoing other leaders, he reaffirmed that “[s]trengthening the link between ambition and financing is essential to turning policy into real, on-the-ground impact.”

Without sufficient financial support, Santoro warned that even well-designed legislative frameworks risk stalling at the planning stage.

The EU envoy also underscored the importance of partnerships with major lenders such as European financial institutions and the Asian Development Bank to expand climate initiatives beyond pilot programs.

“For us, the development partners, and for the governments, Asean governments, partnering with these financial institutions is the way to ensure that what happens at the pilot project level becomes scalable, becomes a larger impact and a larger positive effect,” Santoro said.

He likewise described the private sector as the “only one able to guarantee the sustainability of the action which is currently going at government-to-government level.”

He said the private sector can provide expertise needed for climate resilience projects, including technical knowledge on resilient infrastructure, risk management, and other systems needed to implement sustainability policies.

A separate report presented during the summit by advisory firm Penta found that Asean sustainability efforts remain heavily focused on “broader themes” and policy announcements, with “less emphasis on execution and measurable outcomes.”

The report noted that while energy transition has emerged as one of the region’s most credible pathways toward long-term resilience, sustainability initiatives in areas such as circular economy and sustainable agriculture remain underdeveloped.

READ: Asean Summit in Cebu: 10 heads of state confirmed, Myanmar to send envoy

Robert Borje, executive director of the Philippines' Climate Change Commission, speaking at the panel, also warned that climate financing could become even tighter due to ongoing geopolitical tensions.

"Resources are always limited," Borje said. "In the current geopolitical realities that we have, resources will be tight and will probably become even tighter."

The remarks came as the Philippines faces growing energy challenges after the country was placed under a state of national energy emergency due to the impact of the conflict in the Middle East.

The summit was organized by the EU-Asean Business Council and the European Chamber of Commerce of the Philippines, as endorsed by the Philippines' Department of Trade and Industry, under the auspices of the Philippines' 2026 Asean Chairmanship.

The event is marked as one of the official sideline events of the 48th Asean Leaders' Summit.  
/dl

## PHILIPPINE INFORMATION AGENCY

### [CCC pushes for action-driven and results-oriented climate approach](#)

At the ASEAN-EU Sustainability Summit 2026, the Climate Change Commission (CCC) underscores the need to shift ASEAN–EU climate cooperation from policy alignment to implementation, emphasizing the urgency of delivering concrete, measurable results on the ground.

CEBU CITY, Philippines — The Climate Change Commission (CCC) underscored the need to strengthen implementation systems and address persistent delivery gaps in climate action, emphasizing that ASEAN–EU cooperation must move beyond policy alignment and shift to achieving concrete results on the ground.

Speaking at the ASEAN–EU Sustainability Summit 2026 in Cebu, CCC Vice Chairperson and Executive Director Robert E.A. Borje stressed the urgency of translating climate commitments into measurable outcomes.

“Now is a time for us to take a few steps back and to look at what the gaps and challenges are. Because truthfully, the challenge for us is really delivering on the ground and implementation,” Borje said.

The inaugural ASEAN-EU Sustainability Summit, held on 7 May 2026 as an official side event of the 48th ASEAN Leaders’ Summit, convened key leaders from government, business, and development institutions to advance regional sustainability and resilience, as part of the Philippines’ ASEAN Chairship.

Borje noted that while ASEAN Member States continue to strengthen climate ambition through Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), and other regional frameworks, the challenge now lies in moving consistently from policymaking to implementation and assessment.

He identified three major gaps that continue to constrain climate action delivery across ASEAN: institutional coordination across sectors, ministries, and levels of government; implementation capacity at scale, particularly at the subnational level where execution happens; and project preparation and execution readiness for resilience investments.

“Climate resilience cuts across sectors, ministries, and levels of government, and our delivery systems are still catching up to that reality,” Borje said, adding that implementation support at scale remains critical across ASEAN Member States and local governments.

The CCC emphasized that these challenges should also be viewed as opportunities to strengthen cooperation between ASEAN, the European Union (EU), governments, development partners, and the private sector in accelerating practical and scalable climate solutions.

Borje underscored the importance of adopting a whole-of-society approach, recognizing the private sector as a key partner in mobilizing finance, innovation, technology, and investments needed to strengthen resilience and support green growth.

“Government should see the private sector as a key partner,” he said, stressing that climate and resilience policies must be grounded in realities while maintaining ambition and enabling investments that move communities “from a state of fragility to a state of agility.”

The CCC also highlighted the importance of integrated and science-based approaches to climate resilience, particularly amid growing energy and economic uncertainties affecting the region.

Borje described the ongoing energy crisis as a “systemic shock” and “systemic stress” for countries that remain dependent on fossil fuels, emphasizing the need for governments to balance immediate energy security concerns with long-term goals for a just and equitable green transition.

He cited the Philippines’ ongoing efforts to strengthen energy efficiency, energy security, and renewable energy investments while promoting resilience-oriented and data-driven policymaking.

The CCC likewise underscored the value of ASEAN–EU cooperation in advancing innovation, climate governance, risk-informed planning, and science-based decision-making, including through the use of satellite and Earth observation technologies such as the Copernicus programme.

As ASEAN Chair in 2026, the Philippines continues to advocate for stronger regional cooperation that prioritizes execution, scalability, and inclusivity in climate action.

The CCC reaffirmed its commitment to working with ASEAN-EU cooperation to strengthen implementation systems, scale effective solutions, and ensure that climate policies translate into real, measurable benefits for vulnerable communities.

## MANILA STANDARD

### [CCC, Netherlands search ways to push nature-based solutions](#)

The Climate Change Commission (CCC) and the Netherlands led by Ambassador Marielle Geraedts are exploring ways to advance nature-based solutions (NBS) as a key strategy for climate change adaptation and mitigation.

At a meeting held at the CCC, both parties highlighted opportunities to strengthen bilateral cooperation on climate action, especially in scaling up ecosystems-based approaches that reduce climate risks while supporting sustainable development.

“Nature-based solutions are among the most powerful and practical responses to the climate crisis,” said CCC vice chairperson and executive director Robert E.A. Borje.

“By working with ecosystems-based approaches such as protecting forests, restoring wetlands and rehabilitating coastal areas, we not only reduce greenhouse gas emissions but also strengthen our natural defenses against climate impacts,” he said.

Both parties identified potential areas of collaboration, including participation in ASEAN–Netherlands cross-learning initiatives on climate adaptation and NBS, aimed at facilitating the exchange of technical expertise and best practices across the region.

The discussions are aligned with the Philippines’ National Adaptation Plan (NAP) 2023–2050, which identifies the scaling up of nature-based solutions as a key cross-sectoral strategy, as well as the Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), which outlines the country’s commitment to greenhouse gas emissions reduction and climate resilience.

The Netherlands, recognized globally for its expertise in water management, climate adaptation and integrated, nature-based approaches to flood risk reduction, expressed its support for a strengthened partnership with the Philippines through knowledge sharing, capacity-building and innovative solutions.

The CCC said strong partnerships with development partners such as the Netherlands are crucial in advancing climate action, particularly in mobilizing climate finance, technology transfer and capacity-building support.

This engagement reflects the CCC’s commitment to continued collaboration among governments, development partners and local stakeholders to accelerate the implementation of nature-based solutions in support of the country’s climate resilience and sustainable development agenda.

**=END=**