

Republic of the Philippines  
Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao  
**BANGSAMORO TRANSITION AUTHORITY**  
Cotabato City

*Fourth Regular Session*

BTA Bill No. 197

Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao  
Parliament  
FILES AND INDEX DIVISION  
**RECEIVED**  
Name: ADELAH DIMPATAN Signature: [Signature]  
Date: 06/14/22 Time: 1:25 PM

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Introduced by **MP AMILBAHAR S. MAWALLIL**  
Co-authored by **ENGR. BAJANTAN A. AMPATUAN, ATTY. RASOL Y. MITMUG, JR.,**  
**ATTY. LAISA MASUHUD ALAMIA, ATTY. SUHARTO M. AMBOLODITO, ENGR.**  
**DON MUSTAPHA A. LOONG, RASUL E. ISMAEL, ABRAHAM T. BURAHAN**

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**AN ACT**  
**DECLARING BALOBOK CAVE IN BONGAO, TAWI-TAWI AS A REGIONAL**  
**HERITAGE ZONE, PROVIDING FOR ITS PROTECTION, PRESERVATION, AND**  
**PROMOTION, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES**

**EXPLANATORY NOTE**

Tawi-Tawi, the far-south islands of the Philippines is known to have been blessed in numerous aspects.

The islands of the Philippines were first introduced to Islam during the 14<sup>th</sup> century through the seas and straits of Tawi-Tawi. In recent years, when the region was afflicted with an almost perpetual cycle of violent conflicts, the province of Tawi-Tawi remained peaceful. More peaceful even compared to other provinces in the country.

Despite having been isolated from the greater lands in the country, surrounded by its vast coastline, the province thrived through its bountiful aquatic resources. Tawi-Tawi boasts of its ecological balance. The iconic Bud Bongao remains inhabited by wildlife unique to the province. The islands are home to several flora and fauna species.

Its history, culture, natural resources, scenery, and pristine beaches, all of these together make up a cornucopia of a tourist haven. Yet, there is still more to explore. In Barangay Lakit-Lakit, east of Bongao Municipality lies a rock formation and part of a cave system situated along the coast, named by the locals as the *Balobok*.

The Balobok Cave is found to be one of the earliest human settlements in Southeast Asia dating back to 8,000 years ago. Recent efforts to excavate the area led to the discovery of ancient artifacts such as earthenware shards, polished stones, and bone tools. Also, some accounts point out that the cave served as a natural shelter for the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) combatants in the 1970s.

Bangsamoro Transition Authority  
**OFFICE OF MP AMIR S. MAWALLIL**  
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Due to the significance of this archeological site, it is only natural for the Bangsamoro Government to preserve, protect, promote and develop the Balobok Cave in Bongao, Tawi-Tawi. This bill seeks to declare the Balobok Cave as a regional heritage zone.

In view of the foregoing, the passage of this bill is earnestly sought.



**AMILBAHAR S. MAWALLIL**  
Member of the Parliament

Republic of the Philippines  
Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao  
**BANGSAMORO TRANSITION AUTHORITY**  
Cotabato City

*Fourth Regular Session*

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Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao

Office of the Secretary  
Bangsamoro Transition Authority  
Cotabato City  
Name: ADELATH DIMPATAN  
Date: 06/14/22  
Time: 1:55 PM

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Introduced by **MP AMILBAHAR S. MAWALLIL**  
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ATTY. LAISA MASUHUD ALAMIA, ATTY. SUHARTO M. AMBOLOD TO, ENGR.  
DON MUSTAPHA A. LOONG, RASUL E. ISMAEL, ABRAHAM T. BURAHAN**

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**AN ACT**  
**DECLARING BALOBOK CAVE IN BONGAO, TAWI-TAWI AS A REGIONAL  
HERITAGE ZONE, PROVIDING FOR ITS PROTECTION, PRESERVATION, AND  
PROMOTION, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES**

**Section 1. Short Title.** – This Act shall be known as the “*Balobok Cave Preservation Act of 2022*”

**Section 2. Declaration of Policy and Principles.** – It shall be the policy of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao to recognize as an integral component of regional development the transcendental importance of collecting, preserving, reviving, protecting, and harnessing the cultural heritage of the people in the Autonomous Region.

Section 2, Article V of the *Bangsamoro Organic Law* states that the Bangsamoro Government shall exercise its authority on matters pertaining to libraries and museums, historical, cultural and archeological sites. Towards this end, it shall study and put forward the history, and promote the preservation of sites of cultural and archeological significance found within the region.

**Section 3. Balobok Cave.** – The Balobok Cave, located in Barangay Lakit-Lakit, Bongao, Tawi-Tawi is hereby declared as a regional heritage zone. A regional heritage zone shall refer to historical, anthropological, archeological, and artistic geographic areas that are culturally significant to the Bangsamoro region.

The Bangsamoro Commission for the Preservation of Cultural Heritage (BCPCH) and the Ministry of Environment, Natural Resources and Energy (MENRE) shall primarily be in charge of the actions necessary for the implementation of this Act, the site preservation, protection, development, and promotion.



**Section 4. *Profile and natural boundary.*** – Within six (6) months after the approval of this Act, the BCPCH, MENRE, in partnership with the Tawi-Tawi Provincial Government shall initiate the study of the site, not limited to physical inspection, research, measurements, coordinates, and all other interventions necessary to establish a verified account, precise profile and jurisdiction of the heritage zone.

**Section 5. *Protection and management plan.*** – The BCPCH, MENRE, Ministry of Trade, Investment and Tourism (MTIT), and the Tawi-Tawi Provincial Government shall jointly formulate a comprehensive plan for the heritage zone's preservation, protection, rehabilitation, infrastructure installation, development into ecotourism, management and maintenance.

**Section 6. *Ancestral lands and rights.*** – Ancestral lands and customary rights and interests arising from the declared jurisdiction of the heritage zone shall be accorded due recognition. The BCPCH and MENRE shall jointly prescribe rules and regulations to govern the ancestral lands within the heritage zone.

**Section 7. *Coordination.*** – The BCPCH shall coordinate with national agencies for the recognition of the Balobok Rock Shelter as a heritage zone. The BCPCH shall also facilitate the implementation of national programs supplemental to the development plans of the heritage zone by the region.

**Section 8. *Implementing Rules and Regulations.*** – Within ninety (90) days from the passage of this Act, the Bangsamoro Commission for the Preservation of Cultural Heritage, in close coordination with the Ministry of Environment, Natural Resources and Energy shall promulgate the implementing rules and regulations of this Act.

**Section 9. *Appropriations.*** – Such sums as may be necessary for the initial implementation of this Act shall be taken from the current appropriations of the Bangsamoro Commission for the Preservation of Cultural Heritage. Thereafter, the fund necessary to carry out the provisions of this Act shall be included in the annual General Appropriations Act of the Bangsamoro.

**Section 10. *Separability Clause.*** – If any provision of this Act shall be held unconstitutional or invalid, the other provisions not otherwise affected shall remain in full force and effect.

**Section 11. *Repealing Clause.*** – All laws, executive orders or issuances, or any parts thereof which are inconsistent herewith, are hereby repealed or amended accordingly.

**Section 12. *Effectivity Clause.*** – This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after publication in a newspaper of general circulation in the region.

*Adopted,*

AUTHOR:



**AMILBAHAR S. MAWALLIL**  
*Member of the Parliament*

Certified correct:

**PROF. RABY B. ANGKAL**  
*Secretary-General*

Attested by:

**ATTY. PANGALIAN M. BALINDONG**  
*Speaker*