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Palawan town to stop issuing permits for open-pit mines

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Posted date: March 31, 2008

PUERTO PRINCESA CITY, Philippines -- At least 37 pending mining applications, mostly on nickel, were stopped on their tracks Monday after the local government unit of Quezon, the municipality known as the hot spot of mining projects in southern Palawan, declared it had enough with open-pit nickel mining.

"We will no longer entertain any new applications and we will not endorse any of the pending ones," Quezon town Mayor Ronilo B. Caputilla told the Philippine Daily Inquirer, parent company of INQUIRER.net.

Quezon hosts the south's second largest mining project, the Berong Nickel Corp. (BNC) project.

Records obtained from government agencies show that the municipality has the highest number of mining applications in the nickel-rich southern Palawan.

Asked what prompted the local government to take the same stand earlier made by the city government of Puerto Princesa, Caputilla said they were worried about the potential damage to the environment.

"With Berong (Nickel Corp.) alone, we have received too many complaints from local residents about the siltation of the river and the shorelines. We dread to see what happens if we allow more of these kinds of project," he said.

Caputilla added that the municipality was prioritizing its program to boost local coconut production.

"Our main program is about encouraging the planting of more coconuts as this will benefit more farmers and their families. With mining, only a few people benefit," he said.

Asked to comment on BNC's claim of following the world's best practice in environmental management in connection with a mining project, Caputilla claimed that the company only showed them portions of the mining project.

"They showcase areas that look okay but they don't bring their visitors to areas that are really problematic," he said.

Apart from BNC, which has a mineral production sharing agreement (MPSA) approved by the previous municipal leadership, two other MPSA applications for limestone quarry were earlier approved in 2001 by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources for the Quezon-Central Palawan Mining and Industrial Corp. and Palawan Star Venture Mining Inc.

[^ Back to top](#)