

No place for crocodiles in Philippines: official

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A captured crocodile is seen in a cage in Manila in 2001. Efforts to save the Philippine crocodile, a "critically endangered" reptile, could go in vain as bureaucrats oppose their release into the wild, a top Philippine environment official said Wednesday.

Efforts to save the Philippine crocodile, a "critically endangered" reptile, could go in vain as bureaucrats oppose their release into the wild, a top Philippine environment official said Wednesday.

A 24-year-old captive breeding programme in the country has produced about 7,000 Philippine [crocodiles](#) and saltwater crocodiles, but they have nowhere to go, the environment secretary Ramon Paje told reporters.

Releasing them into rivers and marshes would ideally lead to the delisting of the Philippine crocodile -- *Crocodylus mindorensis* -- from

the country's "critically endangered" species list, he said.

"The problem is, we cannot delist it yet because the rules say you can only delist from the [endangered species list](#) if it's already surviving in its natural habitat," Paje said.

"There is no mayor anywhere in the Philippines who would allow the release of crocodiles in his municipality."

The environment ministry has been threatened with lawsuits over such planned releases, he said, with local officials expressing concern that the reptiles could attack locals in surrounding areas.

Government-employed crocodile hunters captured a 21-foot (6.4-metre) saltwater crocodile from the southern Agusan marsh in early September after it reportedly killed two people.

Local officials from the northern towns of San Mariano and Palanan complained that they were not consulted when 19 captive-bred Philippine crocodiles were released recently in a nearby [forest reserve](#), Paje said.

Paje did not say how the national government planned to resolve the deadlock.

The International Union for the [Conservation of Nature](#) in Switzerland listed *Crocodylus mindorensis* -- a large freshwater crocodile found only in the Philippines -- on its "critically endangered" list in 1996.

Experts working with the environment ministry say there are less than 100 of them left in the wild.

The ministry says the Philippine crocodile and the [saltwater crocodile](#)

are "critically endangered" mainly due to loss of habitat as a result of human population growth and expansion.

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