

Department of Trade and Industry

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## **DTI initiates consumer protection reforms through the first ASEAN Peer Review on Consumer Protection**

On 18 October 2021, the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), through its Consumer Protection Group (CPG), held the National Conference on the ASEAN External Peer Review on Consumer Protection as part of this year's Consumer Welfare Month Celebration.

With the participation of the international partners, the National Conference presented the External Peer Review Report (EPR) on Consumer Protection with the Philippines as the first country in ASEAN that volunteered to undergo the ASEAN Peer Review.

The Peer Review Team (PRT) consists of Malaysia, Vietnam and the ASEAN Secretariat, with support from the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH (GIZ), ASEAN Committee on Consumer Protection (ACCP), regional expert Dr. Sathita Wimonkunarak, and country experts Atty. Anthony Abad and Atty. David Rosario (Trade Advisory Group, Inc.). The Peer Review examined the existing consumer protection systems and provided recommendations on policy reforms and opportunities to further strengthen consumer protection in the country.

The assessment covered a wide range of aspects in the areas of policy formulation, advocacy, monitoring and enforcement, and redress.

The EPR discussed and evaluated the country's legal and institutional framework for the implementation of consumer protection actions across different sectors, the stakeholder landscape and effectiveness of relevant entities in charge of consumer protection, the extent of compliance within the private sector, and consumer awareness, assertiveness, and access to redress.

It noted the vast track record and advances of consumer protection in terms of advocacy and enforcement based on the Consumer Act of the Philippines, as well as other fair trade laws and supplementary rules and regulations.

However, it also noted the need for the Consumer Act to be modernized and updated to overcome regulatory overlaps according to prevalent laws and implementing regulations.

It also acknowledged challenges in ensuring that the regulatory framework stays current and coherent, both on paper and in practice. Some of the challenges highlighted were the limited facilities and manpower, particularly in the provinces, and in collectively taking up, on behalf of consumers, larger claims against businesses, as is common in other countries, among others.

The report also encouraged the consumer organizations to be strengthened in order to leverage educational efforts and facilitate dispute resolution. Another opportunity mentioned is the improvement of inter-agency coordination mechanisms.

Lastly, it recommended paying particular attention to addressing impacts on consumers, particularly through updated legal provisions that help protect and provide redress for digital consumers.

DTI-CPG Undersecretary Ruth B. Castelo emphasized that "consumer protection is a shared responsibility; the DTI continues to empower consumers by strengthening consumers laws, and actively conducting consumer education programs. Currently, the DTI has been working on the revision of the Consumer Act of the Philippines to make it more consumer-centric instead of government-oriented."

"This is a very welcome development for the Philippines. We already have a clear direction with the existing consumer protection policies. We are willing and ready to assist other countries that will undergo the peer review," DTI-CPG Undersecretary Castelo added.

The Malaysian Ministry of Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs (MDTCA), the Vietnam Competition Authority (VCCA), and the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) congratulated the Philippines for being the first country in ASEAN to undergo the ASEAN Peer Review and delivered messages of support during the National Conference.

Consumers are advised to regularly visit the DTI's Consumer Care social media accounts for updates.

For other consumer-related concerns, send an email to CPAB@dti.gov.ph. **END**