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Closed Fishing Season Policy increases productivity of commercial sardine fishing in Zamboanga City



Fisherfolks gather their fresh catch of sardines at Zamboanga Sibugay Bay photo courtesy of www.pcaarrd.dost.gov.ph & PhilStar.com

Who does not love sardines? A great source of protein, these little fishes are tasty, easy to cook and very affordable. In fact, Filipinos from all walks of life eat sardines and it's a part of our rich food culture.

A significant increase in the productivity of commercial sardine fishing and cannery due to the Closed Fishing Season Policy of sardines, that translates into the general improvement of the Zamboanga City economy and therefore increase in livelihood and job opportunities for the fisher folks and their families.

Impact Of The Policy

The policy increased the supply of sardines and other large pelagic fishes, such as tunas and mackerels for the local fishers that results to a better food supply and source of income in the area. According to the latest analytic research conducted by Elsevier and latest Philippine Statistics Authority data, there was an increase in fish stock resulting to increase in landed catch of 181,918.51 metric tonnes. Increase in the incomes

of fisher folks and fishing crews of canning factories was also seen. The study's primary data were gathered through house to house surveys, resource person interviews and group discussions with local stakeholders.

Policy In Focus

In view of the issues on the decline of sardines catch in Zamboanga Peninsula the closed fishing season policy was implemented. It aimed to increase the population of the fishes, conserve and protect aquatic resources.

The Closed Fishing Season Policy is Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) Administrative Circular 255 (BAC 255) series of 2014 entitled "Establishing Closed Season for the Conservation of Sardines in East Sulu Sea, Basilan Strait and Sibuguey Bay". Commercial fishing (Purse Seine, Ringnet, Bagnet and Scoop net) are not allowed from December 1 to March 1 of every year. But during this time, municipal fishing is allowed.

The policy was strengthened

further through the efforts of Roberto Baylosis Executive Vice President of SOPHIL Fishing Association, Director Noel Barut, Dr. Mudjekeewis Santos and Abdul Gapor Abdua. The group pushed the implementation of the policy not just in Zamboanga, but in the whole country.

Sardine Industry In Zamboanga

According to Dr. Mudjekeewis Santos, Ph.D, Scientist II of the National Fisheries Research and Development Institute (NFRDI) there is an increase in the abundance of sardine population in the Zamboanga Sibuguey Bay.

"There were significant yearly increases in sardine catch by the commercial and municipal fishers in Zamboanga area of up to 30% starting 2013, the 3rd year of the implementation of the policy." Dr. Santos said.

He also added that the catch yield of sardines have been recorded in other fishing grounds such as Davao Gulf, West Sulu Sea, which were previously absent for the past couple of years most likely

due to a spill-over effect.

According to the Department of Science and Technology-Philippine Council for Agriculture, Aquatic and Natural Resources Research and Development (DOST-PCAARRD) implementation of seasonal control such as the open and closed season policies for fishing regulates the overexploitation of marine fish species and resources. It also helped authorities to ensure sustainability of the sardine population in the nearby regions and also includes other species of fishes like the red coral grouper or suno, green grouper or loba, and brown marble grouper or laping-baboy.

Dr. Santos added *“Anecdotal reports also indicate that municipal fishermen have started to catch bigger fishes such as tunas and mackerels “tanigue” in the coastal areas of Zamboanga Peninsula, which were also already not existent for the past years, most likely due to the availability of sardines as food.”*

According to local sardine canneries in Zamboanga, they have been operating at full capacity in recent years such that their warehouses are already full at earlier months than the usual, even during the duration of the policy.

Negative Effects of the Policy and Alternative Livelihood of the Fisherfolks

Though generally effective, the policy also has a few negative effects in the area, according to Dr. Santos.

Fishermen working as crew members in the local commercial fishing boats, are out of livelihood of during the closed fishing months. Reports also suggest that due to the oversupply of sardines even in coastal areas, there was a decrease in the prices of sardines at levels where the municipal fishermen do not fish for sardines anymore which also cause the decrease of income from fishing.

During the implementation months of the policy, some of the fishermen that were affected are enrolled in the 4Ps Program of the local government unit.

Department of Labor and Employment and Technical Education Skills Development Authority also opened their livelihood training support programs to fishermen who were affected. The Commercial fishing and canning companies have likewise provided support to their fishers, by employing them in alternative work such as rubber tree planting.

BFAR also provides input assistance for seaweed seedlings and seaweed farming that establishes post-harvest facilities such as smokehouses, elevated fish solar dryers. On the other hand, the local bottled sardines' and canning processors are minimally affected during the closed fishing season. The canning sardines' processors were able to develop strategic measures that decrease the effect of the fishing ban policy.

The local canning sardines' processors also scheduled the factory cleaning and maintenance during the three-month closed fishing season.

The Future of the Policy

According to Dr. Santos, the policy is effective in maintaining the population of sardines and in ensuring the ability of the fishes to spawn and mature. But NFRDI including BFAR and DOST-PCAARRD can still refine the closure time as provided by BAC 255. For instance, there is also a need to consider conserving the minor spawning period of sardines which happens during the summer season.

As provided by BAC 255, there is a Technical Working Group (TWG) which oversees the implementation of the closure for refinement of the policy.

Fig 1. Conservation Areas for Sardines in portions of East Sulu Sea, Basilan Strait and Zamboanga Sibugay



DEFINITION OF TERMS

Pelagic Fishes - categorized as coastal and oceanic fish, based on the depth of the water they inhabit.

Coastal pelagic fish inhabit sunlit waters up to about 655 feet deep, typically above the continental shelf. ex: anchovies, sardines. Oceanic pelagic fish inhabit waters below the continental shelf. Ex: tuna, mackerel.

Spawning Period – the time of the year which the fishes spawn or lay their eggs.

Marketable Size – the size requirement of the fishes to be canned and sold as determined by the canning factories and market vendors. It is between 12 to 16 cm. (4.7 – 6.3 inches)

Sustainable Yield - fish catch that remains stable at a certain effort.

Catch Yield - or production, the volume of fish caught in kilos or tonnes.

Spill-Over Effect - fishes that migrate outside its usual distribution area.