

Small fisherfolk to get Laguna Lake fisheries priority

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By Philippines News Agency

The Laguna Lake Development Authority (LLDA) will prioritize small fisherfolk for fisheries in Laguna de Bay, the Philippines' biggest lake.

Allocation of the lake's fishing areas will prioritize such fisherfolk there, noted LLDA general manager Jaime Medina.

"We're also looking into the viability of organizing them into corporation-like fishing cooperatives that'll operate there," he said.

Both measures aim at helping improve small fisherfolk's competitiveness and socio economic condition, he noted.

"Those measures are also aligned with the 1987 Constitution," he said.



Members of the Philippine Coast Guard, along with officials of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources and Laguna Lake Development Authority, dismantle illegal fishpens at Laguna Lake on January 26, 2017. (Manila Bulletin file photo)

Under the Constitution, the State “shall protect the rights of subsistence of fishermen, especially of local communities, to the preferential use of the communal marine and fishing resources, both inland and offshore.”

The State “shall provide support to such fishermen through appropriate technology and research, adequate financial, production, and marketing assistance, and other services,” the Constitution also reads.

“Cleaning up Laguna de Bay and dismantling illegal fish structures there are among LLDA’s ways of helping small fisherfolk,” noted Medina.

Laguna de Bay has a surface area of about 90,000 hectares.

LLDA said fisheries is Laguna de Bay’s dominant use but this lake also serves as a transport route, flood water reservoir, recreational hub, water sink for solid and liquid waste and source of potable water while water there is used for power generation, irrigation and industrial cooling.

According to Medina, LLDA is updating its zoning and management plan (ZOMAP) for Laguna de Bay to further improve management and regulation of this lake’s fishery resources.

“Years of non-adherence to Laguna de Bay’s zoning disadvantaged small fisherfolk since large operators were the ones able to locate in the lake and earn big from their aquaculture activities there,” he recalled.

He hopes to address such iniquity by strictly implementing the updated ZOMAP.

It’s still unclear if LLDA will allocate more than 51 percent of Laguna de Bay’s total fishing area to small fisherfolk and leave the rest of this fishing area to commercial aquaculture operators.

LLDA will set the final allocation based on results of its study on the matter, he said.

On Feb. 1 this year, LLDA’s board issued Resolution 518 which declared a one-year moratorium on operation of all fish pens, fish cage, and other aquaculture structures in Laguna de Bay.

Medina said LLDA already commenced validating its list of about 22,000 people fishing in Laguna de Bay to identify legitimate small fisherfolk there.

“Small fisherfolk, not big operators, will get priority for fisheries there once the moratorium is over,” he said.

He said LLDA is coordinating with Land Bank of the Philippines, Department of Labor and Employment as well as Department of Agriculture and its Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources regarding assistance for such fisherfolk.

Various experts also volunteered their services to help the fisherfolk, he noted.

“We want to teach such fisherfolk sustainable fisheries so they can really earn once they start managing their respective fish pens,” he said.

LLDA said fish, mollusks and crustaceans are among Laguna de Bay’s aquatic species.

Citing Philippine Statistics Authority data, Medina said aquaculture and open fishing accounted for 57,000 metric tons and 11,600 metric tons of total fisheries production in Laguna de Bay last year, respectively.

A 1999 National Statistical Coordination Board (NSCB) report cited a higher annual Laguna de Bay aquaculture yield of some 60,000 metric tons in 1973 and total open water catch of almost the same quantity.

NSCB noted that the culture of milkfish or bangus (scientific name: *Chanoschanos*), one of the country's most commercially important fish species, commenced around 1973 with this technology being originally intended for small fisherfolk.

Fish pens covered only some 5,000 hectares of Laguna de Bay in 1973 but this ballooned to about 31,000 hectares by 1982 amidst rising interest in aquaculture, NSCB continued.

The resulting congestion as well as siltation and pollution are among the problems jeopardizing Laguna de Bay's fisheries prospects.

To help address such problems, LLDA's Board Resolution 518 this year banned the agency from issuing permits and clearances on any aquaculture activity in Laguna de Bay.

The resolution also banned new stocking of fingerlings in Laguna de Bay's existing aquaculture structures.

Earlier, LLDA targeted setting a new carrying capacity for aquaculture in Laguna de Bay.

The agency also targets concluding this year the dismantling of erring aquaculture structures.

"Top priority for dismantling are fish pens each covering an area exceeding one hectare but without LLDA-issued permits," Medina said early this month.

Second priority for dismantling are structures each with an area exceeding one hectare and with LLDA permits but violated Laguna de Bay's zoning and management plan, he noted.

The structures' operators are delinquent in paying fish cage fees and charges, he added.

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