

# Group to DENR: Spare ‘baklad’ in Laguna de Bay from demolition

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The Pambansang Lakas ng Kilusang Mamamalakaya ng Pilipinas (Pamalakaya) on Tuesday cautioned the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) against dismantling small fish traps within Laguna de Bay.

Fish traps, or *baklad*, allow fishermen to catch fish in open waters. These should not be mistaken as fish cage or fish pen, as the National Anti-Environmental Crime Task Force (NAECTF) gear up to dismantle fish cages and fish pens starting this month, Pamalakaya Chairman Fernando Hicap said.

The DENR’s moratorium on fish cage and fish pen operation starts this year in line with President Duterte’s marching order to allow small fishermen to benefit from the lake’s bounty.

Some small fishers in Laguna de Bay have resorted to building *baklad* because fish becomes harder to catch in open waters.

According to Pamalakaya, the average fish catch in Laguna de Bay is 2 kilograms to 3 kg per day, compared to 10 kg to 15 kg per day three decades ago, before fish cages and fish pens started to mushroom and occupy large portions of the lake.

The DENR has given the fish pen and fish cage operator until March to harvest their cultured fish and to remove their structures.

The agency also announced that it will demolish illegal and unregistered fish cages and structures first, causing apprehension among small fishers who own small *baklad* and fish cages.

“We fear that even the *baklad* owned by small fishers will not be spared from government’s campaign to dismantle wide fish pens in the lake. Those *baklad* are the Laguna lake fishers’ alternative livelihood since open fishing is not that sustainable anymore,” Hicap said.

Pamalakaya said large fish pens and fish cages should be demolished to allow small fishermen to cover more areas when fishing in open water.

The group also said the abolition of fish pens should lead to proper and complete rehabilitation of the dying lake and not to conversion of the productive fishing water into eco-tourism zone.

The Laguna de Bay is the largest freshwater lake and biggest aquaculture hub.

Around 13,000 hectares of the lake’s 90,000 hectares surface are occupied by fish cages and fish pens, making the region the biggest producer of cultured tilapia and *bangus*, which supplies Metro Manila other areas of Luzon with affordable fish.

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