

Philippines, la fermeture de la saison de pêche de la sardine commence à porter ses fruits

The sardine closed season in Zamboanga peninsula has significantly increased sardine catch since its implementation three years ago, according to the Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (DA-BFAR).

BFAR national director Asis G. Perez said that the success of the sardine closed season is the result of the unyielding cooperation between local government units, partner agencies, and stakeholders.

"For three years now, we see reports of an increased volume in sardine production supported by testimonies from the fisherfolk as well as sardine operators. This, indeed, affirms our decision to establish a closed season for the conservation of sardines," said Perez.

Under the Joint DA-DILG Administrative Order or JAO-1 s. 2011, sardine fishing in the waters of East Sulu Sea, Basilan Strait, and Sibuguey Bay is temporarily suspended for three months from 1 December to 1 March in order to give way to the fish species' spawning period.

Comparison of annual figures from the Bureau of Agricultural Statistics (BAS) of previous years shows that sardine catch for both commercial and municipal fisheries in Zamboanga grew by 6.34 per cent in 2012 with a total production of 156,143.01 tonnes against 2011's 146,835.66 tonnes. A decline of 2.83 per cent, however, was recorded for the year 2013 with 151,720.32 tonnes as a result of reduced fishing trips due to weather disturbances and typhoons.

The hike in the population of sardines particularly "tamban" or Indian sardine was likewise felt in nearby regions 10 and 11. BAS data, in fact, indicated a rising trend for sardine production in region 10, which started from 18,559 tonnes in 2011 to 20,705.85 tonnes in 2012 and finally, 22, 911.51 tonnes in 2013. Davao Region has also registered 72.14 per cent increase in sardine production from 1, 767.96 tonnes in 2012 to 3, 043.43 tonnes in 2013. Perez said that this is a possible spill-over effect of the previous closed seasons in Zamboanga.

Amid ongoing tension between military troops and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) fighters in Zamboanga City last year, BFAR implemented the third sardine closed season on 1 December, 2013. It was lifted, three months later, on 1 March, 2014.

Reports that reached BFAR Region 9 indicated a relatively strong compliance by the stakeholders apart from isolated incidences when commercial fishing vessels would be sighted fishing in the prohibited areas.

As to the offshoot of the recent fishing closure, Roberto Baylisis, a member of the National Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Management Council (NFARMC) Medium-Scale Commercial Fisheries, said that the industry is yet to see its whole impact only two weeks since the closed season was lifted. Fisherfolk and sardine operators, however, have expressed clamor for the continued implementation of the closed season every year, BFAR 9 said.