

## Amid scandal and coronavirus, Peru sets 13 May launch date for anchovy season

The launch of the first season for anchovy fishing in Peru's north-center region has been set for 13 May, with Peru's Ministry of Production (PRODUCE) setting a capture limit of 2.4 million metric tons (MT).

The fishery, which targets both *Engraulis ringens* and *Anchoa nasus* for use in indirect human consumption – primarily, fishmeal and fish oil used in aquaculture production – is the largest by volume in the world.

The assigned catch quota is based on research performed by Peru's Sea Institute (Imarpe), a specialized technical agency of PRODUCE that advises the state on marine conservation issues. The catch limit is based on data collected during scientific expeditions undertaken by Imarpe that estimated the amount of biomass available. According to Peru's National Fisheries Society (SNP), that research came up with an estimate of 10 million MT, "which demonstrates proper management of the species and the industry's commitment to its sustainability."

However, sector actors are so far taking a "wait-and-see" approach to the upcoming fishing season, citing [an impasse between the country's fishing industry and the national government](#).

"A healthy figure should be a quota above 3 million MT, but we can't expect such a thing from the current government," Pablo Trapunsky, CEO of Peruvian fishing firm Pesquera Diamante, told SeafoodSource. "Imarpe's report on biomass is still not public so we can't assess the situation in further detail," and only when the information is available will companies be able to determine "what the real status of the fish is," Trapunsky said.

In mid-January, in a blow to Peru's anchovy fishing firms, PRODUCE [declared a premature close to the anchovy fishing season](#) in the country's north-central region due to the presence of a high number of juveniles in the fishery. But the closure only came after heated protests from the country's local fishermen over what they argued was a failure by the ministry to protect the country's anchovy resources. During that season fishing, firms



caught only a fraction of the 2.7-million-MT limit established by PRODUCE.

In turn, the national prosecutor [solicited the search and seizure](#) of documents and property at Imarpe, upon suspicion of data adulteration and inflated numbers related to the measurement of anchovy biomass, to supposedly favor industrial fishing companies' catch limits. The institute was also suspected of leaking confidential scientific information to these firms. Both sector actors and the SNP brushed off the allegations, insisting there was no wrongdoing.

“Imarpe has had a long-lasting relationship with the fishing companies, since these are the ones confirming the data they study and forecast,” Trapunsky said at the time. “We certainly do have a lot of meetings during the year with Imarpe, and of course we need them to know how things are developing. They're the experts and we run a business quite intensive in cap-ex and maintenance, for which we need to be aware of conditions on the ocean and the successful buildup of anchovy biomass.”

He acknowledged that fishing companies have indeed hired some former Imarpe scientists, since they have intimate knowledge of the fishery and can help companies optimize their fishing and correctly read oceanographic conditions. Diamante itself has an employee who used to work at Imarpe and “this guy knows everyone in Imarpe, since all of them are scientists and they have a close relationship,” Trapunsky acknowledged.

Trapunsky backed Imarpe's credentials and capacity, saying the institute had acted according to standard procedures.

“The whole thing is just a clear intention of the government to politically control a scientific entity,” he said.

In its latest release, PRODUCE highlighted conservation guidelines that must be obeyed.

“The extraction and/or processing of anchovy specimens with sizes smaller than those provided in current regulations is prohibited, allowing a maximum tolerance of 10 percent in number of specimens. When juveniles are removed in percentages greater than 10 percent of the daily landings at a certain port, fishing activities ... will be suspended for a minimum of three consecutive days.” Imarpe is to monitor

the daily catches of anchovies.

However, catch limits and the presence of juveniles are not the only issues Peru's fishing sector is facing. The worldwide outbreak of the Covid-19 virus has forced Peruvian fishing companies into a delicate balancing act between continuing operational activities while safeguarding workers' health. PRODUCE has called for "the gradual and incremental start of activities in this sector," underlining its sanitary operation protocol regarding the re-start of industrial fishing activities in the country.

Peru's National Fisheries Society (SNP) President Cayetana Aljovín, the trade association representing the country's largest fishing and fishmeal processing firms, confirmed that fishing activities will be carried out in compliance with a strict health protocol drawn up in accordance with the guidelines issued by the Ministry of Health and PRODUCE.

"The current fishing season will allow fishermen to generate income, it will boost the fishing areas' economy due to its multiplier effect and will contribute to generating the necessary resources so that the state can care for thousands of people who have been affected by COVID-19," she said in a statement.

SNP has hired an external auditor to oversee compliance with the operating protocols, and the association has the power to suspend any associated company's operations if noncompliance is confirmed, Aljovín added. Certification company SGS Peru audited a number of fishing companies – including Austral Group, CFG-Copeinca, Hayduk Corporación, Pesquera Cantabria, Pesquera Capricornio, Pesquera Caral, Pesquera Centinela, Pesquera Exalmar, Pesquera Diamante, Pesquera Pacífico Centro, and TASA – and all of them were found to be in compliance with the health security protocol, the executive noted.

The north-center region's anchovy fishing season will run until the quota is reached or Imarpe recommends closure due to environmental or biological circumstances.

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