

#BFARPressRelease | DA-BFAR Rolls Out IEC Campaign Against Trade of Illegally Diverted Imported Fish Commodities in the Wet Markets

Following the government's recent move to allow the importation of frozen small pelagic fish for wet markets while the closed fishing season is underway, the Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (DA-BFAR) intensifies its Information, Education and Communication (IEC) campaign against selling of imported fish unauthorized for the wet markets, particularly diverted frozen fish commodities authorized only for canning, processing, and institutional buyers.

The DA-BFAR IEC Campaign titled, "Imported na Isda sa Merkado, Pwede Kapag AWTORISADO!" will run for seven days from November 24 to December 3, 2022. It will visit a total of twenty-one (21) wet markets in Metro Manila, targeting fish vendors.

The campaign has two main objectives: 1. to inform and educate wet market fish vendors of the two different policies allowing fish importation in the country: a. for wet markets and b. for canning, processing and institutional buyers, including ways to determine fish imported under each of these policies, and 2. to encourage them not to sell imported fish products intended for canning, processing and institutional buyers, and help prevent, at their level, the illegal diversion of these products that are unauthorized for wet markets.

"As the government allows fish importation anew in order to fill in the supply gap while our conservation measures are in place and keep the prices of our fish commodities in the retail markets stable, the DA-BFAR conducts this IEC Campaign that will help safeguard the livelihood of our local fishers and prevent competition between our local and imported fish products," DA-BFAR Officer-in-Charge Atty. Demosthenes R. Escoto said.

He adds and emphasizes that only fish imported through Fisheries Administrative Order (FAO) 259 and the recent CNI, which gives priority to municipal fishing associations/cooperatives and commercial fishing operators affected by the closed fishing season, are allowed to be sold in the wet markets.

On November 10, 2022, the Department of Agriculture (DA) issued a Certificate of Necessity to Import (CNI) 25,000 metric tons of frozen fish comprising round scad, bigeye scad, mackerel, bonito and moonfish for wet markets pursuant to FAO 259 series of 2018. Under this policy, importation of fish for wet markets is allowed through a CNI only during closed fishing season or occurrence of calamities. Hence, as specified in the said CNI, importation for the wet markets is only allowed until the end of the closed fishing season next year, January 2023.

Another policy, the FAO 195 series of 1999, meanwhile, also authorizes, albeit without the need for a CNI, the importation of fresh/chilled/frozen fish and fishery/aquatic products for canning and processing purposes, including those undertaken by institutional buyers or accredited entities importing fish for final consumption or food requirements of hotels and restaurants. The campaign reiterates that selling of these imported products in the wet markets is strictly prohibited and will result in confiscation of goods.

Following the IEC campaign, the DA-BFAR is set to ramp up its market monitoring, inspection and confiscation of illegally diverted imported fish products.

Aside from this activity, the DA, through BFAR, is also implementing efforts to dissuade and prevent attempts of diversion and other importation-related violations. One of the agency's immediate steps concurrent with the importation for wet markets is the suspension, with few exceptions, of the issuance of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Import Clearances (SPSIC) for the importation of round scad, mackerel, bonito, moonfish, pompano and tuna by-products under FAO 195. This is expected to minimize, if not completely eliminate, opportunities that may be exploited by violators.

The Bureau is also set on intensifying its control measures on importation such as strengthening border control through seaport/airport and cold storage warehouse inspections, including mandatory X-ray inspection of all reefer vans, and deployment of additional personnel for the first and second borders inspection.

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