

SUNDAY | MARCH 11, 2018

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## Management framework for sardines needed

By CATHERINE TALAVERA

The Philippine government needs to craft a national management framework to address the overfishing of sardines, a number of local fisheries experts said.

University of the Philippines-Visayas scientist Wilfredo Campos said there is already a decline in fish stocks due to heavy fishing pressure and environmental changes.

"Sardines are being overfished and existing policy measures are not enough to protect them, especially spawning fish," Campos said.

Campos cited data from their studies which showed that sardines are getting smaller, and spawn maturing

early. He added that catching sardines would be more sustainable if they are allowed to mature for at least two years, so they can reproduce more.

"To keep up with being caught too quickly, they biologically adapt by maturing early to compensate for their population loss. They remain small, and spawn less compared to ideal, mature sardines," Campos said.

In 2012, the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) ordered a closed season for sardines in major fishing grounds including the Visayan Sea and the Zamboanga Peninsula to ensure that they will be protected during spawning months from November to March.

Environmental Defense Fund in the Philippines ad-

visor Jose Ingles, however, noted the importance of protecting sardines even after the spawning season.

He said there is often a "race to fish" for sardines, where commercial fishers may end up catching the juveniles which are expected to spawn next season.

"There should be other additional measures to protect the little fish that were produced during the spawning season. These include setting catch limits and reducing fishing efforts which will help protect the juvenile sardines, especially during the race to fish season," Ingles said.

Ingles said measures must be urgently implemented in fishing grounds that are already overfished. These include setting catch limits

and reducing fishing efforts.

"We need a participatory and science-based management framework for sardines. This will serve as a holistic guide in implementing the policies that will focus on the biological and socio-economic aspects of sardine management," Ingles said.

Oceana Philippines senior marine scientist Jimely Flores said the management framework for sardines is necessary in the implementation of policies that are based on science and research, including data from the National Stock Assessment Program of BFAR.

"We have called on BFAR to reconvene the Technical Working Group (TWG), and together with our scientists, craft the much-needed management framework for sardines," Flores said.

He added that the management framework should include timely and transparent scientific data for policy support, and a review process for implementation.

"We need to work together in sustainably managing our sardines through science-based policies. This way, we can ensure that there will always be sardines, a small but important fish," Flores said.

Sardine fishery is a main economic driver in the Philippines as it provides food and livelihood for millions of Filipinos. In 2015, it netted 344,730,201 kilograms worth P7.43 billion.

In addition, sardines are also crucial in the food chain, eaten by high-value fish such as tuna, mackerel and scad, plus larger predators like sharks and dolphins.



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