

Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Batasan Hills, Quezon City

NINETEENTH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

2024
HOUSE BILL NO. _____



Introduced by Honorable Representatives
ARLENE D. BROSAS (Gabriela Women's Party),
FRANCE L. CASTRO (ACT Teachers Partylist),
and **RAOUL DANNIEL A. MANUEL (Kabataan Partylist)**

AN ACT MANDATING THE PROVISION OF THE P15,000 FINANCIAL SUPPORT TO THE ONE MILLION FILIPINOS EMPLOYED IN THE FISHERIES AND AQUACULTURE SECTOR TO PUMP-PRIME THE WHEELS OF PRODUCTION AS A CRUCIAL CONTRIBUTION TO THE RECOVERY OF THE NATIONAL ECONOMY FOR THE SECTOR RECOGNIZED AS "VULNERABLE AND MARGINALIZED" AMID ECONOMIC CRISIS

EXPLANATORY NOTE

The small fisherfolk in the country is more or less synonymous with being the "poorest of the poor." Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) data shows that poverty incidence among basic sectors was highest in the fisherfolk sector until 2015 when farmers slightly surpassed it. In 2006, it was 41.2%, 2009 41.3%, 2012 39.2% and 2015 34%. These numbers should have illuminated policymakers the severity of fisherfolk's impoverished situation, especially when the 2015 poverty threshold was set to P9,064 for a family of five, or around P300 per day.

Moreover, the small fisherfolk is identified in the Republic Act No. 8425 Social Reform and Poverty Alleviation Act, as artisanal fisherfolk, defined as "*municipal, small scale or subsistence fishermen who use fishing gear which do not require boats or which only require boats below three (3) tons.*" Presumably derived from the definition set in the Republic Act No. 8550 Fisheries Code of 1998. The National Anti-Poverty Commission (NAPC) elaborated on the Social Reform Agenda as being part of "*the poor' and 'the marginalized'*" and "*those directly or indirectly engaged in taking, culturing, or processing fishery or aquatic resources. These include, but are not to be limited to, those engaged in fishing using gears that do not require boats, or boats less than three (3) tons, in municipal waters, coastal and marine areas; workers in commercial fishing and aquaculture; vendors and processors of fish and coastal products; and subsistence producers such as shell-gatherers, managers, and producers of mangrove resources, and other related producers.*"

In relation, the dimension of vulnerability establishes the social, economic, and cultural plight of the small fisherfolk. The United Nations defined vulnerability as the risk of being negatively affected by shocks, which may be caused by nature or man-made. Some scholars simplify it as being "*vulnerable to poverty when she or he is at risk of becoming poor or at risk of remaining poor,*" while based on the paper "Vulnerability to Income Poverty: Trends from 2003 to 2015" by Jose Ramon Albert, Ph.D. and Jana Flor Vizmanos, of the Philippine Institute for Development

Studies (PIDS), it was described as *"their[households] chance of being poor in the future exceeds the national poverty rate."*

In the said paper, based on the 2015 Family Income and Expenditure Survey (FIES), a minority 16.1% of the fisherfolk sector was classified as non-vulnerable, or a majority 83.9% was vulnerable to poverty, with varying degrees between highly to relatively. By major income source classification, only 16% was non-vulnerable, or 84% was vulnerable. It was the second most vulnerable on the list, following Forestry and Hunting, where only 11.1% was non-vulnerable. It undoubtedly implied that drastic changes in a situation such as national calamities, or a pandemic, could dramatically throw the sector into a state of poverty.

The United Nations, in its various documents and pronouncements, especially on the "Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication," classified the fisherfolk as part of the "vulnerable and marginalized groups." The UN Committee on Fisheries stated that *"small-scale fishers and fish workers account for over 90% of all people involved in capture fisheries and are considered to be among the most vulnerable people engaged in fisheries and could be potentially 'left behind', unless appropriate consideration and action are taken."* Last March, when UN Secretary-General António Guterres appealed for a global ceasefire in armed conflict said that *"women, children, people with disabilities, the marginalized and the displaced, all pay the highest price in conflicts and are also most at risk of suffering devastating losses from COVID-19."* In June, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) claimed that the fisherfolk sector is *"among the most affected by the [pandemic] crisis."*

Amid the enactment of the Social Reform and Poverty Alleviation Act, and various statistical data that establish the impoverished and vulnerable state of the small fisherfolk sector, it should be accepted that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and corresponding governmental responses have gravely affected the sector. Thus, they should be put into due recognition as a beneficiary of the Republic Act No. 11469 or Bayanihan to Heal As One Act. However, based on the fourteen reports of President Rodrigo Duterte from March 30 to June 30, 2020, the sector was again presented as *"nakalimutan"* or, in effect, was again marginalized.

In the Department of Agriculture's (DA) press statement on March 25, 2020, "DA to set in motion ALPAS COVID-19 to ease the threat of hunger," Secretary William Dar said that *"the Urban Aquaponics Project and the Enhanced Aquaculture and Sustainable Capture Fisheries in Inland Waters will get a total of P1B,"* and *"[in] addition to the assistance provided by the Department of Labor and Employment and the Department of Social Welfare and Development, DA will grant Social Amelioration, with the P3B recommended budget, to farmers, fishers and farm workers."* On the numerous reports on the supposedly pandemic response, there was no elaboration by the DA on the announced support for the urban aquaponics project, aquaculture, and sustainable capture fisheries in inland waters. Nonetheless, these sub-sectors do not involve the small fisherfolk or open sea municipal fishers. Moreover, the social amelioration to fishers, supposedly separate from those provided by other agencies, appeared as *"nakalimutan,"* as the "P3 billion budget" was actually for the Financial Subsidy to Rice Farmers (FSRF) program allotted for near 600,000 rice farmers.

The remaining parts that involved the fisherfolk were "Other Assistance to Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) and Productive Sectors," and "Access to Agri-Fishery Products and Ensuring Uninterrupted Supply Chain." Akin to DA's preliminary press release promise, the fishers were only part of the marginal small farmers and fishers or 40,000 MSFFs allotted with P1 billion credit facility. On top of this marginalization, this involved concessionary loans, totally divergent to subsidy to rice farmers. Moreover, the so-called "access" and ensuring the uninterrupted supply chain is on the sphere of circulation, or involved traders. It is distant from

the sphere of production where the small fisherfolk is based. Briefly, for the small fisherfolk who are inadvertent beneficiaries of a loan program, though already engrossed in poverty and indebtedness, and an accidental recipient of the market-oriented intervention.

There was no subsidy for fisheries production. It is unfortunate that under the crucial moment of the pandemic, the DA has virtually neglected the principles stated in the Social Reform and Poverty Alleviation Act supposedly to benefit the small fisherfolk, such as social dimension access to quality basic services, economic dimension asset reform and access to economic opportunities, ecological dimension sustainable development of productive resources, and governance dimension democratizing the decision-making and management processes. This latest gross error, amid numerous cautions by the United Nations and legitimate pleas of the fisherfolk movement led by the Pambansang Lakas ng Kilusang Mamamalakaya ng Pilipinas (Pamalakaya) for adequate support, resulted in furthering marginalization and vulnerability of the sector should be rectified.

Then came the present chronic oil price crisis, since last quarter of last year. Early February, local fisherfolk usually using 10 liters of diesel faced a P1,760-increase for their 16-fishing day month, from last year's monthly cost of P7,200 to P8,960. Then in March, it even increased to around P3,800 per month. There were manifestations that some local fisherfolk stopped sailing for fear of bankruptcy caused by increased costs in fuel.

A pressing rectification is to provide the small fisherfolk sector with due production subsidy and the fish workers with social amelioration. Based on the PSA's April 2020 Labor Force Survey, nearly 1.1 million are employed in the fisheries and aquaculture sector. A bulk 64% work less than 40 hours, while another 12% are off their workplaces. The small fisherfolk and fish workers are presumed to operate the near 260,000 registered municipal fishing vessels and work on the near 8,200 commercial fishing vessels, as posted by the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR). Thus, this bill pushes the P15,000 financial support to the country's 1 million frontline fisherfolk, contributing to the national food security amid the pandemic.

The said support aims to pump-prime the wheels of production, particularly the small-scale or subsistence fishery production, as a crucial contribution to the recovery of the national economy and the alleviation of the impact of the economic crisis on the already impoverished and vulnerable fisherfolk households.

The urgent passage of this bill is earnestly sought.



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Be it enacted by the Senate and the House of Representatives of the Philippines in this Congress assembled that:

Section 1. Short title. – This Act shall be known as "P15,000 Financial Support to the One Million Frontliner Fisherfolk Act."

Section 2. Declaration of Policies. – The State shall hold that the national fishery and aquatic resources sector is vital for the recovery of the national economy and attainment of national food security and recognizes the fisherfolk sector as a frontliner sector, deserving of adequate support and amelioration amid the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and economic crisis.

The State shall uphold the policy declared by the Republic Act No. 8425 or Social Reform and Poverty Alleviation Act for a sectoral intervention to poverty alleviation, wherein, the small fisherfolk and fish worker family, as referred in this act, shall be empowered to meet its minimum basic needs for income security, health, food and nutrition and other facets of adequate standard of living.

The State shall recognize the fisherfolk sector as among the most vulnerable and marginalized, bearing the brunt of the impact of the pandemic and economic crisis, and adopts the urgency of support intervention.

The State shall declare the support stated in this act, that consequently sustains small-scale or subsistence fishing as the country's contribution to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal No. 14 to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine

resources for sustainable development, and to reduce hunger and improve nutrition, alleviate poverty, generate economic growth and ensure better use of natural resources.

Section 3. *Beneficiaries.* – The beneficiaries of this Act shall be the 1 million Filipinos employed in the fisheries and aquatic sector, as recorded by the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), to directly receive the amount of fifteen thousand pesos (P15,000), provided with the following prioritization:

- a. belonging to households below poverty line;
- b. municipal fishers and fish workers employed or operating municipal fishing vessels, regardless of the status of licensing and registry to the respective local government unit;
- c. fish workers employed in commercial fishing vessels and aquaculture such as in fish pens, fish cages, fish corrals/traps, fishponds, prawn farms, sea farms, salt beds, fish ports, fishing boats or trawlers;
- d. other workers in ancillary sectors related to the supply, construction, and maintenance of fishing vessels, gears, nets, and other fishing paraphernalia; fishery machine shops; and other facilities such as hatcheries, nurseries, feed plants, cold storage and refrigeration, processing plants and other pre-harvest and post-harvest facilities;
- e. operators of small-scale commercial fishing vessels or vessels with a gross tonnage of 3.1 to 20.

Section 4. *Function of the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Reforms (BFAR).* – The Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Reforms shall:

- a. be appropriated with funding for the purpose of this Act;
- b. finalize the list of the beneficiaries, guided by the aforementioned section, in close coordination with the PSA, and respective local government units;
- c. formulate the mechanism of direct distribution of the financial support to the beneficiaries;
- d. execute the direct distribution at the earliest possible time;
- e. and promptly publicize the status of distribution.

Section 5. *Appropriations.* – For the purpose of this Act, the sum of fifteen billion pesos (P15,000,000,000) is hereby appropriated to BFAR as supplemental appropriations for the FY 2020 Budget.

Section 6. *Implementing Rules and Regulations.* – The BFAR, upon consultation with People's Organizations (POs) or Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) advocating the rights of small fisherfolk shall issue the Implementing Rules and Regulations within 15 days from this Act's effectivity.

Section 7. *Effectivity.* – This Act shall take effect immediately upon publication.

Approved,