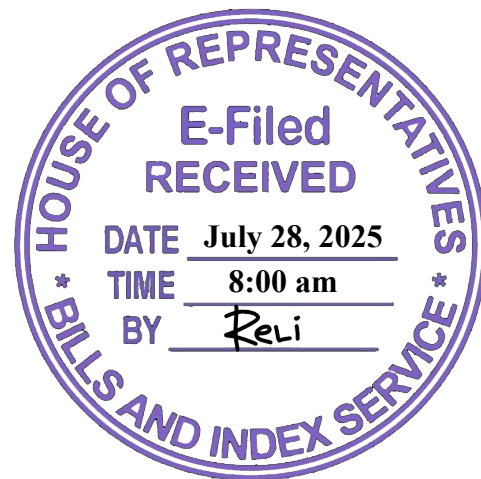


Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 2322



Introduced by Representatives
BELLA VANESSA B. SUANSING and MIKAELA ANGELA B. SUANSING

**AN ACT CREATING A CONGRESSIONAL COMMISSION ON AGRICULTURE
AND FISHERIES TO REVIEW, ASSESS, AND EVALUATE THE STATE OF
PHILIPPINE AGRICULTURE AND RECOMMEND INNOVATIVE AND
TARGETED POLICY REFORMS IN AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES,
APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES**

EXPLANATORY NOTE

The following measure seeks to establish a Congressional Commission on Agriculture and Fisheries, or AGRICOM, to perform a comprehensive review, assessment and evaluation of all existing programs, projects, activities and initiatives currently implemented for the development of the Philippine agriculture and fisheries sector across all national agencies and instrumentalities, in pursuit of a more targeted, efficient, efficacious and integrated approach to agricultural development in the Philippines.

In line with our country's perennial national vision and aspirations to elevate agriculture as the primary driver of long-term growth and development in all communities and localities in the country, our government has enacted innumerable laudable policies and legislation in pursuit of this formidable goal. Pieces of legislation adopted into law have, among many things, created a long list of exhaustive and thoughtfully crafted policy frameworks targeting all subsectors of agriculture and fisheries, and have established, in good faith, a running list of advisory and consultative bodies aiming to give a multitude of recommendations from all sides of the issues and challenges faced by our local agriculture and fisheries subsectors. On the part of Congress, two congressional oversight committees on national agriculture and fisheries policy and programs have been created by law: the Congressional Oversight Committee on Agricultural and Fisheries Modernization (COCAFAM) established by Republic Act No. 8435 (or the Agriculture and Fisheries Modernization Act of 1997), and more recently in 2024, the Congressional Oversight Committee on Anti-Agricultural Economic Sabotage established by Republic Act No. 12022 (or the Anti-Agricultural Sabotage Act).

However, it is not the absence of legislation, nor the absence of policies, programs and projects, nor the absence of advisory and consultative bodies for policies and programs relating

to agriculture and fisheries that is the source or cause of the problems facing the sector: it is the fact that the frameworks, policies, programs, projects and bodies created by legislation and other national policies are currently being implemented and operationalized in silos. Advisory and consultative bodies currently convened fall under the jurisdictions and report solely to their mother departments, with documents and other pertinent information undisclosed and unavailable to the public even upon request. Some councils do not have regular meetings because of the unavailability of their members, most of whom serve as ex officio members, due to prior commitments or issues with tenure security. Most government instrumentalities convened and mandated by law to perform functions relating to policy implementation, research and development, price stability, capacity building of local players and participants, are paralyzed by conflicting mandates enforced by different agencies and government bodies, conditions which arise from the lack of coordination among the agencies and government bodies ordering the directives. Policies implemented by one agency for an agricultural subsector run contrary to the policies implemented by another for the same subsector. Redundancies in programs and policies due to the disjointed nature of program and policy implementation for the agriculture and fisheries sector continually lead to the double allocation of funds for the same type of program but under different agencies, while other programs and policies of significance suffer low budget allocations or even lack of funding. The list of issues and challenges continues.

This country takes its pursuit of developing our agriculture and fisheries sector into its primary pillar of human capital development, sustainable and dignified structural transformation, and economic security on both the national and local levels. The challenges and issues that result from the current lack of an integrated approach to agriculture and fisheries development speak volumes: while a quarter of our nation's workers work in agriculture, unskilled workers,¹ in agriculture and fisheries experience, on average, at least five percent lower monthly wage rates than their counterparts in manufacturing and services,² labor productivity in agriculture and fisheries continues to decline,³ all the while the sector only produces about nine percent of our country's gross domestic product and exports from the sector lag behind our neighbors in the ASEAN Region,⁴ despite the latter (i.e. the countries of Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam) having larger agricultural bases compared to the Philippines.

¹ Elementary Occupations (Unskilled Workers) as defined by the Philippine Statistics Authority. From "Table 1. Average Monthly Wage Rates of Time-Rated Workers on Full-Time Basis in Selected Industries and Occupations, Philippines: August 2022 (in Establishments Employing 20 or More Workers). *Philippine Statistics Authority* (2023). From: <https://psa.gov.ph/system/files/lsredsd/2-%28ons-cleared%29-2022%20OWS%20Tables-signed.pdf>

² From "Table 1. Average Monthly Wage Rates of Time-Rated Workers on Full-Time Basis in Selected Industries and Occupations, Philippines: August 2022 (in Establishments Employing 20 or More Workers). *Philippine Statistics Authority* (2023). From: <https://psa.gov.ph/system/files/lsredsd/2-%28ons-cleared%29-2022%20OWS%20Tables-signed.pdf>

³ From Agriculture and Fisheries Indicators System, 2019 to 2023. *Philippine Statistics Authority* (2024). From https://psa.gov.ph/system/files/main-publication/AFIS%20Employment%20and%20Wages%20in%20Agri%20and%20Fishing%202019-2023_e-signed.pdf

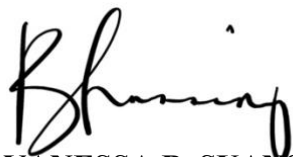
⁴ Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam each have expanded their total export value for agriculture and fisheries products to the USD 30-50 Billion range, while the Philippines was only able to increase its agriculture and

The following measure seeks to address the issues and challenges arising from the current state of the national framework for agriculture and fisheries development by establishing the Congressional Commission on Agriculture and Fisheries, or AGRICOM. Upon establishment and upon its convening, the AGRICOM shall assess and re-examine existing policies, programs and projects in agriculture and fisheries development in order to refocus and reprioritize support programs for increasing productivity, global competitiveness, capacity building for the sector and its subsectors, while streamlining and restructuring current policies, programs, and programs to remove redundancies, to ameliorate issues in lack of funding or underfunding of programs of utmost significance (ex. research and development projects) and to avoid conflicts in policies implemented by agencies and government instrumentalities involved in agriculture and fisheries development.

The AGRICOM, supported by an independent technical secretariat, shall formulate short-term and long-term policy and program recommendations relating to agriculture and fisheries, consisting of specific, targeted, measurable and time-bound solutions to the issues and challenges facing the sector. It shall, upon the recommendation of sectors and stakeholders concerned and impacted by agriculture and fisheries development policies, programs, and projects, report its accomplishments, findings and recommendations to the Filipino people, for swift, prompt and proper action on the part of enforcement and implementing agencies. Importantly, the AGRICOM aims to create a cooperative and productive relationship with departments and other government instrumentalities involved with enforcement and implementation by assisting the latter in assessing the challenges and streamlining the policies and programs to be implemented by all institutions of government, thereby assisting these bodies in balancing pressing mandates relating to agriculture and fisheries development with their own respective multiple departmental mandates.

To ensure the dignity of every Filipino farmer and fisherfolk, the foundation of the Philippine economy, the country must begin by confronting the structural problems existing in both our agriculture and fisheries sectors. This Commission will serve as the cornerstone of that effort—bridging past lessons with future aspirations.

Given the foregoing, the immediate passage of this measure is earnestly sought.



BELLA VANESSA B. SUANSING
2nd District of Sultan Kudarat



MIKAELA ANGELA B. SUANSING
1st District of Nueva Ecija

fisheries export volume from USD 2.3 Billion in 1990 to USD 7 Billion in 2020. From Briones, R. 2023. “How Modern is Philippine Agriculture and Fisheries.” Philippine Institute of Development Studies.

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

SECTION 1. Short Title. - This Act shall be known as the "Congressional Commission on Agriculture and Fisheries (AGRICOM) Act"

SECTION 2. Declaration of Policy. – The State shall reaffirm the promotion of a just and dynamic social order that will ensure the prosperity and independence of the nation that frees the people from poverty through policies that provide adequate social services, promote full employment, a rising standard of living, and an improved quality of life for all. The State shall affirm labor as a primary social economic force, shall develop a self-reliant and independent national economy effectively controlled by Filipinos, and shall promote comprehensive rural development and agrarian reform. To such ends, the State shall take the appropriate steps to ensure that the national agriculture and fisheries sector shall be a robust, dynamic and sustainable means to economic security on participants on the production side of the sector, and shall be a driver for human capital development, human liberation and development, and overall well-being and welfare on the part of Filipino consumers.

SECTION 3. Objectives of AGRICOM. - The Commission shall, among other things, critically review and assess agriculture and fisheries policies, strategies and programs to attain the following objectives:

- a) Re-examine public sector goals and objectives with respect to agriculture and fisheries;
- b) Modify agriculture and fisheries policies and public expenditures to integrate modern technologies and climate change adaption with the ultimate goal of raising the

productivity and the global competitiveness of our local agriculture and fisheries subsectors, and to employ long-term policy instruments for raising productivity, protecting the environment and improving market efficiency and ensure equity and social justice, particularly for the benefit of small farmers and their families;

- c) Refocus and re-prioritize support programs for agriculture and fisheries to ensure food security in basic staples for all local Filipino communities;
- d) Restructure and streamline agriculture and fisheries-related bureaucracies to address their institutional weaknesses and shortcomings, including the relationship between and among national, provincial and local stakeholders, in order to effectively implement agriculture and fisheries policies and programs, including the transfer of information and technology, particularly at the grassroots level; and
- e) Encourage the active involvement of producers, cooperatives, media, banks, financial institutions and other members of the private sector in the development of agri-business.

SECTION 4. Creation of AGRICOM. - There is hereby created a Congressional Agriculture and Fisheries Commission, hereinafter referred to as the Commission, to undertake a comprehensive national assessment and evaluation of the performance of the Philippine agriculture and fisheries sector for the purpose of recommending transformative, concrete and targeted reforms in the sector with the end of ensuring food security in the Philippines.

SECTION 5. Composition of AGRICOM. - The Commission shall be composed of twelve (12) members, with six (6) members from the Senate and six (6) members from the House of Representatives: *provided*, that one of the six (6) members coming from each House shall represent the Minority as designated by the Minority Leader of each House.

The Chairpersons of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Food and Agrarian Reform, the Senate Committee on Economic Affairs, and the Senate Committee on Environment, Natural Resources and Climate Change shall be members of the Commission on the part of the Senate.

The Chairpersons of the House Committee on Agriculture and Food, the House Committee on Aquaculture and Fisheries Resources, the House Committee on Agrarian Reform, and the House Committee on Climate Change shall be members of the Commission on the part of the House of Representatives.

The other members from the Senate and the House of Representatives shall be designated by the Senate President and the Speaker of the House of Representatives, respectively.

The members of the Commission shall receive no compensation, but travelling, communications, and other necessary expenses shall be allowed, subject to existing laws, rules and regulations.

SECTION 6. Executive Director. - The Executive Director (ED) to be appointed by the Commission must be a recognized expert in the fields of agriculture and fisheries.

The ED shall be a citizen of the Philippines with good moral standing and reputation, of recognized probity and independence, and have substantial experience and expertise in policymaking related to, or the practice of, agriculture development, aquaculture and fisheries development, economics, and sustainability.

The ED shall work full-time and shall have the rank, privileges, and emoluments of an Executive Director IV (Salary Grade 29).

SECTION 7. Technical Secretariat. - A Technical Secretariat, to be headed by the Executive Director, shall be organized to provide technical and administrative support to the Commission in the exercise of its powers and performance of its functions under Section 11 of this Act.

The Executive Director shall organize its staff and technical panel, and hire and appoint such employees and personnel, whether temporary, contractual, or on consultancy, and determine their compensation subject to applicable civil service laws, rules and regulations, with a view to ensuring a competent and efficient secretariat.

The Technical Secretariat shall co-exist with the Commission.

SECTION 8. Philippine Institute for Development Studies as Research Arm. - The PIDS shall serve as the research arm of the Commission. During the course of the Commission's existence, it shall produce data-based research and provide analysis to contribute to the formulation of agriculture and fisheries policy recommendations. It may coordinate with existing advisory and consultative bodies on agriculture and fisheries policies under the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Science and Technology.

SECTION 9. Agriculture and Fisheries Legislation and Policy Advisory Council. - An Agriculture and Fisheries Legislation and Policy Advisory Council is hereby created to provide the Commission with expert assistance and advice. The members of the Advisory Council shall always be present in all meetings of the Commission. The Senate President and the Speaker of the House of Representatives, upon the recommendation of the members of the Commission, shall choose recognized experts from the following sectors to form part of the Advisory Council: three (3) members from state university academia with equal representation from Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao, two (2) members from the business sector, two (2) members from government agriculture and fisheries agencies, two (2) members who are heads of LGUs, and two (2) members from civil society organizations and development partners engaged in agriculture and fisheries

SECTION 10. Duration of AGRICOM. - The Commission shall accomplish its mandate within three (3) years from its organization. It shall organize itself and commence its mandate upon the effectivity of this Act.

SECTION 11. Powers and Functions of AGRICOM. - The Commission shall have the following powers and functions:

- a) Formulate short-term and long-term policy and program recommendations relating to agriculture and fisheries consisting specific, targeted, measurable and time-bound solutions to include the following:

- i) Sectoral plans and targets;
 - ii) Physical and digital infrastructure;
 - iii) Trainings and programs;
 - iv) Financing; and
 - v) Coordination among departments and sectors concerned.
- b) Approve the workplan, guidelines and overall framework for the conduct of the national review, assessment and harmonization tasks and the budget for the programs of the Commission and all disbursements therefrom, including compensation of all personnel;
- c) Hold hearings and receive testimonies, reports and expert advice on the status of the Philippine agriculture and fisheries sector and its subsectors, exhaust available options to identify problems, and consolidate coherent courses of action as remedies;
- d) Summon by subpoena any public official or private person to testify before it, or require by subpoena *duces tecum* the production of necessary documents, as may be deemed necessary by the Commission;
- e) Secure from any department, bureau, office or instrumentality of the government technical information, preparation and production of reports, and the submission of recommendations or plans, as may be required;
- f) Conduct multi-stakeholder consultations, using proper mechanisms and guidance;
- g) Collaborate with emerging and innovative industries and services for the sharing of important information relative to their practice in the development of the agriculture and fisheries sectors;
- h) Review and act upon the recommendations of the Technical Secretariat or Standing Committees, or both, as it may deem appropriate;
- i) Report to Congress biannually its accomplishments, findings and recommendations on actions to be taken by Congress, the departments, and other government agencies concerned with the implementation of policies and programs related to the agriculture and fisheries sector;
- j) Submit a final report of its findings and recommendations with a program of implementation to the President and Congress at the end of its term;
- k) Recommend the adoption of legislation and other executive measures pursuant to its findings;
- l) Review and prioritize pending legislation before both Houses pursuant to the findings contained in the report of the Commission; and
- m) Perform such other duties and functions as may be necessary to attain its objectives.

SECTION 12. Standing Committees. - The members of the Commission shall establish from among its members standing committees, to be chaired by such members or experts from

multisectoral groups, and engage resource persons from the public and private sectors as may be needed.

SECTION 13. Appropriations. - The amount necessary for the initial implementation of this Act shall be charged against available appropriations of the Senate and the House of Representatives. Thereafter, the amount necessary for its continuous implementation, including any deficiency in the current year, shall be included in the annual General Appropriations Act subject to existing budgeting, accounting and auditing rules and regulations.

SECTION 14. Separability Clause. - If any provision or part of this Act is declared invalid or unconstitutional, the remaining parts not affected shall remain in full force and effect.

SECTION 15. Repealing Clause. - All laws, executive orders, presidential decrees, administrative orders, rules and regulations, issuances, or parts thereof inconsistent with or contrary to the provisions of this Act are hereby repealed or amended accordingly.

SECTION 16. Effectivity. - This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in the Official Gazette or in a newspaper of general circulation.

Approved,