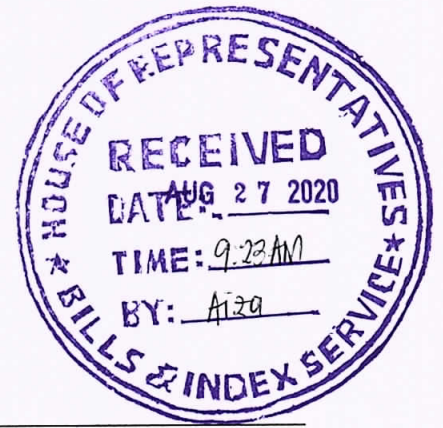


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Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City

EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS
Second Regular Session

HOUSE BILL No. 7525



Introduced by

**BAYAN MUNA Representatives EUFEMIA C. CULLAMAT,
CARLOS ISAGANI T. ZARATE and FERDINAND R. GAITE,
GABRIELA Women's Party Representative ARLENE D. BROSAS,
ACT TEACHERS Party-List Representative FRANCE L. CASTRO,
and KABATAAN Party-List Representative SARAH JANE I. ELAGO**

AN ACT

**MANDATING THE PROVISION OF THE P15,000 - FINANCIAL SUPPORT TO
THE 1 MILLION FILIPINOS EMPLOYED IN THE FISHERIES AND
AQUACULTURE SECTOR, TO PUMP-PRIME THE WHEELS OF PRODUCTION,
AS CRUCIAL CONTRIBUTION TO THE RECOVERY OF THE NATIONAL
ECONOMY AND AS RESPONSE MECHANISM TO MITIGATE THE IMPACT OF
THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC TO THE SECTOR RECOGNIZED AS
"VULNERABLE AND MARGINALIZED"**

EXPLANATORY NOTE

The small fisherfolk in the country is more or less synonymous to being "poorest of the poor." Based on Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) data, poverty incidence among basic sectors was highest on the fisherfolk sector until 2015, when it was slightly surpassed by farmers. In 2006, it was 41.2%, in 2009, it was 41.3%, 39.2% in 2012 and 34% in 2015. This numbers should have illuminated policy-makers of the severity of the impoverished situation of fisherfolk 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, otherwise known as the Fisheries Code of 1998. The National Anti-Poverty Commission (NAPC) elaborated it 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 stated that vulnerability may be defined as the risk of being negatively affected by shocks, which may be caused by nature or man-made. Some scholars

1 simplify it as being “*vulnerable to poverty when she or he is at risk of becoming poor or at risk of remaining*
2 *poor.*” While based on the paper, “Vulnerability to Income Poverty: Trends from 2003 to 2015” by
3 Jose Ramon Albert, Ph.D. and Jana Flor Vizmanos, of the Philippine Institute for Development
4 Studies (PIDS), it was described as “*their[households] chance of being poor in the future exceeds the national*
5 *poverty rate.*”
6

7 On the said paper, based on the 2015 Family Income and Expenditure Survey (FIES), a minority
8 16.1% of the fisherfolk sector was classified as non-vulnerable, or a majority 83.9% was vulnerable
9 to poverty, with varying degrees between “highly” to “relatively.” By major income source
10 classification, likewise only 16% was non-vulnerable, or 84% was vulnerable. It was second most
11 vulnerable among the list, following Forestry and Hunting where only 11.1% was non-vulnerable.
12 This undoubtedly implied that drastic change in situation such as national calamities, or a
13 pandemic, could dramatically throw the sector into a state of poverty.
14

15 The United Nations, on its various documents and pronouncements, especially on the “Voluntary
16 Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries,” classified the fisherfolk as part of the
17 “vulnerable and marginalized groups.” The UN Committee on Fisheries stated that “*small-scale*
18 *fishers and fish workers account for over 90% of all people involved in capture fisheries and are considered to be*
19 *among the most vulnerable people engaged in fisheries and could be potentially ‘left behind’, unless appropriate*
20 *consideration and action are taken.*” Last March, when UN Secretary-General António Guterres
21 appealed for a global ceasefire in armed conflict said that “*women, children, people with disabilities, the*
22 *marginalized and the displaced, all pay the highest price in conflicts and are also most at risk of suffering devastating*
23 *losses from COVID-19.*” In June, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) claimed that
24 the fisherfolk sector is “*among the most affected by the [pandemic] crisis.*”
25

26 Amid enactment of the Social Reform and Poverty Alleviation Act, and various statistical data that
27 establish the impoverished and vulnerable state of the small fisherfolk sector, it should be accepted
28 that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and corresponding governmental responses, have
29 gravely affected the sector, thus, should be put into due recognition as beneficiary of the Republic
30 Act No. 11469 or Bayanihan to Heal As One Act. But based on the fourteen reports of President
31 Rodrigo Duterte from March 30 to June 30, 2020, the sector was again, to be frankly presented, as
32 “*nakalimutan*” or in effect was again marginalized.
33

34 On the Department of Agriculture’s (DA) press statement on March 25, 2020, “DA to set in
35 motion ALPAS COVID-19 to ease the threat of hunger,” Secretary William Dar said that “*the*
36 *Urban Aquaponics Project and the Enhanced Aquaculture and Sustainable Capture Fisheries in Inland Waters*
37 *will get a total of P1B,” and “[in] addition to the assistance provided by the Department of Labor and Employment*
38 *and the Department of Social Welfare and Development, DA will grant Social Amelioration, with the P3B*
39 *recommended budget, to farmers, fishers and farm workers.*”
40

41 But on the numerous reports on the supposedly pandemic response, there was no elaboration by
42 the DA on the announced support to the urban aquaponics project, aquaculture and sustainable
43 capture fisheries in inland waters. Nonetheless, these sub-sectors do not involve the small
44 fisherfolk or open sea municipal fishermen. Moreover, the social amelioration to fishers,
45 supposedly separate from those provided by other agencies, appeared as “*nakalimutan,*” as the “P3
46 billion budget” was actually for the Financial Subsidy to Rice Farmers (FSRF) program allotted for

1 near 600,000 rice farmers.

2
3 The remaining parts that involved the fisherfolk were “Other Assistance to Micro, Small and
4 Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) and Productive Sectors,” and “Access to Agri-Fishery Products
5 and Ensuring Uninterrupted Supply Chain.” Akin to DA’s preliminary press released promise, the
6 fishers were only part of the marginal small farmers and fishers or 40,000 MSFFs allotted with P1
7 billion credit facility. On top of this marginalization, this involved concessionary loans, totally
8 divergent to subsidy to rice farmers. Moreover, the so-called “access” and ensuring of the
9 uninterrupted supply chain is on the sphere of circulation, or involved traders, and is distant from
10 the sphere of production where the small fisherfolk is based. Briefly for the small fisherfolk: there
11 was no subsidy for fisheries production; an inadvertent beneficiary of a loan program, though
12 already engrossed in poverty and indebtedness, and an accidental recipient of the market-oriented
13 intervention.

14
15 It is unfortunate that under the crucial moment of the pandemic, the DA has virtually neglected
16 the principles stated in the Social Reform and Poverty Alleviation Act supposedly to benefit the
17 small fisherfolk, such as: social dimension access to quality basic services; economic dimension
18 asset reform and access to economic opportunities; ecological dimension sustainable development
19 of productive resources; and governance dimension democratizing the decision-making and
20 management processes. This latest gross error, amid numerous cautions by the United Nations,
21 and legitimate pleas of the fisherfolk movement led by the Pambansang Lakas ng Kilusang
22 Mamamalakaya ng Pilipinas (Pamalakaya) for adequate support, resulting to further
23 marginalization and vulnerability of the sector should be rectified.

24
25 A pressing rectification is to provide the small fisherfolk sector with due production subsidy and
26 the fish workers with social amelioration. Based on the April 2020 Labor Force Survey of the
27 PSA, near 1.1 million are employed in the fisheries and aquaculture sector. A bulk 64% are working
28 less than 40 hours, while another 12% are off their workplaces. The small fisherfolk and fish
29 workers are presumed to operate the near 260,000 registered municipal fishing vessels and work
30 on the near 8,200 commercial fishing vessels, as posted by the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic
31 Resources (BFAR). Thus, this bill pushes the P15,000 financial support to the country’s 1 million
32 frontliner fisherfolk, who are contributing to the national food security amid the pandemic.

33
34 The said support aims to pump-prime the wheels of production, particularly the small-scale or
35 subsistence fishery production, as crucial contribution to the recovery of the national economy,
36 and the alleviation of the pandemic’s impact to the already impoverished and vulnerable fisherfolk
37 households.

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39 *The urgent passage of this bill is earnestly sought.*
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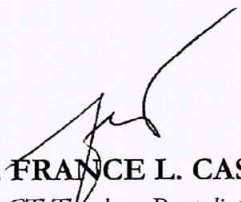
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7 **REP. EUFEMIA C. CULLAMAT**
8 *Bayan Muna Partylist*
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12 **REP. CARLOS ISAGANI T. ZARATE**
13 *Bayan Muna Partylist*
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16 **REP. FERDINAND R. GAITE**
17 *Bayan Muna Partylist*
18

19 
20 **REP. ARLENE D. BROSAS**
21 *GABRIELA Women's Party*
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23 
24 **REP. FRANCE L. CASTRO**
25 *ACT Teachers Partylist*
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28 **REP. SARAH JANE I. ELAGO**
29 *Kabataan Partylist*

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THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC TO THE SECTOR RECOGNIZED AS
"VULNERABLE AND MARGINALIZED"

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

Section 1. *Short title.* – This Act shall be known as "P15,000 - Financial Support to the 1 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 shall recognize that the fisherfolk sector as a frontliner sector, deserving of adequate support and amelioration amid the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The State shall uphold the policy declared by Republic Act No. 8425 or Social Reform and Poverty Alleviation Act for a sectoral intervention to poverty alleviation, wherein, the small fisherfolks and fish worker families, 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, who are bearing the brunt of the economic impact of the pandemic, and adopt 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 which is 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 boat 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 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

1 Act's effectivity.

2

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

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6 *Approved,*