

Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City, Metro Manila
NINETEENTH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

House Bill No. 2769



Introduced by Representative Eduardo Roa Rama Jr.

EXPLANATORY NOTE

Our Constitution recognizes the role of the State in protecting and advancing the right of the Filipino people to a balanced and healthy ecology in accord with the rhythm and harmony of nature. We must all be agents in taking steps to care for, preserve and protect our environment if it is our intention to care for our people.

In 2019, the Philippine Clearing-House Mechanism of the Convention on Biological Diversity published its 6th National Report highlighting that our country was one of the world's most rich countries in biodiversity. However, it is also at the axis of countries with the most biodiversity loss and among the top ten countries with the most number of species threatened with extinction.

Among these species at a high risk of extinction are sharks, rays and chimaeras. According to the Save Sharks Network Philippines ("SSNP"), there are an estimated 200 species of sharks found in the Philippines alone, but less than a quarter of these species are protected by legislation. Sharks are vital actors in maintaining the biodiversity of our ecosystems and in promoting our country's economy both in the fields of tourism and for our fisherfolk.

The SSNP has found that sharks are made vulnerable to several threats: exploitation, directed fisheries, accidental fishery or bycatch, marine debris, habitat destruction, weak law enforcement, unregulated tourism and most of all, their low reproductive potential. In this light, it is imperative to adapt specific conservation and protection strategies for these species.

This bill seeks to adopt, among other things, the Ecosystems Approach to Fisheries Management ("EAFM"). The EAFM is advocated by the Coral Triangle Initiative on Coral Reefs, Fisheries and Food Security ("CTI-CFF") Working Group, which is a group of six Southeast Asian

countries, including the Philippines. The EAFM addresses various needs and desires of society “without threatening the ecosystems and marine resources for the benefit of the future generation.”

Support for the enactment of this measure is earnestly requested.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized, cursive 'E' followed by a horizontal line that tapers to the right.

REP. EDUARDO ROA RAMA JR.

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**AN ACT PROVIDING FOR THE PROTECTION OF SHARKS, RAYS AND
CHIMAERAS IN THE PHILIPPINES**

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

**CHAPTER I
GENERAL PROVISIONS**

SECTION 1. Short Title. – This Act shall be known as the “Shark Conservation Act of the Philippines.”

SEC. 2. Declaration of Policy. – It is hereby declared the policies of the state to:

- a. Protect environmental rights of the people, promote conservation and ensure sustainable utilization of its coastal areas, habitats and species, including sharks and related species in the class Chondrichthyes, in conformity with the Constitution; Republic Act No. 8550, otherwise known as the Philippine Fisheries Code of 1998, as amended by Republic Act 10654; and Republic Act No. 9147, otherwise known as the Wildlife Resources Conservation and Protection Act;
- b. Ensure, for the benefit and enjoyment of the Filipino people, the judicious and wise utilization, protection, conservation and management on a sustainable basis of its coastal and fishery resources with the necessity of maintaining a sound ecological balance and protecting and enhancing the quality of the environment;
- c. Protect the rights of the small and marginal fishers in the preferential use of communal coastal and fishery resources;

- d. Allow a community-based coastal management approach to empower the people's full and active participation in the conservation and management of the coastal and fishery resources and promote awareness of sustainable fisheries through appropriate education and training;
- e. Adopt an ecosystems-based fisheries management approach striving to balance diverse objectives by taking into account knowledge and uncertainties about biotic, abiotic and human components of ecosystems and their interactions and applying an integrated approach to fisheries within ecologically meaningful boundaries; and
- f. Promote and adhere to the precautionary principle of conservation, management and exploitation of living coastal and fishery resources in order to assure the sustainable development of the coastal environment. The absence of adequate scientific and technical information should not be used as a reason for postponing or failing to take conservation and management measures; and

SEC. 3. Scope of Application. – The provision of this Act shall be enforceable in all Philippine waters including other waters over which the Philippines has sovereignty and jurisdiction, and the country's 200 - nautical mile Exclusive Economic Zone ("EEZ") and continental shelf, including protected areas under Republic Act No. 7586, otherwise known as the National Integrated Protected System ("NIPAS") Act, as amended by Republic Act No. 11038; critical habitats; and all Philippine flagged fishing vessels operating in areas governed by a Regional Fisheries Management Organization, in the high seas, or in waters of other coastal states.

SEC. 4. Jurisdiction of the Department of Agriculture. – The Department of Agriculture ("DA") shall have jurisdiction over the catching, sale, purchase, possession, transportation, importation and exportation of sharks, rays, and chimaeras and all declared aquatic habitats. In the Province of Palawan, jurisdiction herein conferred is vested on the Palawan Council for Sustainable Development pursuant to Republic Act No. 7611 insofar as the regulation over the activities described in the foregoing paragraph.

The Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources of the Department of Agriculture ("DA-BFAR") shall be the lead agency in the implementation of this Act. The Department of Trade and Industry ("DTI"), Department of Environment and Natural Resources ("DENR"), the Philippine Coast Guard ("PCG"), the Philippine National Police ("PNP"), other law enforcement agencies, and Local Government Units ("LGUs") shall likewise assist in the implementation of this Act.

The Department of Tourism ("DOT") shall provide the necessary assistance to the DA-BFAR and the LGUs in identifying shark ecotourism sites.

CHAPTER II DEFINITION OF TERMS

SEC. 5. Definition of Terms. – As used in this Act:

- a. *Bycatch* refers to the incidental take of undesirable size or age classes of the target species, or the incidental take of other non-target species or protected, endangered, or threatened species;
- b. *Corridor* refers to an artificial or natural avenue where wide-ranging animals can travel to, plants can propagate in, genetic interchange can occur, populations can move in response to environmental changes and natural disasters, and threatened species can be replenished from other areas. Marine corridors encompass mangroves, coral reefs, and seagrass beds;
- c. *Critical Habitat* refers to a place or environment that contains physical or biological features essential to its conservation;
- d. *Finning* refers to the practice of removing and retaining shark fins;
- e. *Habitat* refers to the place or environment where species or subspecies naturally occur or have naturally established their population;
- f. *Non-detriment Finding (NDF)* refers to a science-based risk assessment where the vulnerability of a species is considered in relation to how well it is managed;
- g. *Shark* refers to cartilaginous fishes belonging to the class Chondrichthyes, which includes true sharks, skates, rays, and chimaeras;
- h. *Shark Sanctuary* refers to designated area where sharks cannot be caught;
- i. *Traceability* refers to the ability to trace and follow food or a substance intended to be or expected to be incorporated into a food or product through all stages of fishing, production, processing and distribution;
- j. *Trade* refers to the act of engaging in the exchange, exportation, importation, re-exportation, purchase or sale of sharks, their derivatives or by-products, locally or internationally;

- k. *Utilized bycatch* refers to non-target species that are traded or consumed, in part or whole.

CHAPTER III

ARTICLE I

CONSERVATION AND PROTECTION OF SHARKS, RAYS, AND CHIMAERAS

SEC. 6. Wildlife Information. – All activities, as subsequently manifested under this Chapter, shall be authorized by the Secretary of the Department of Agriculture, hereinafter referred to as “Secretary”, upon proper evaluation of best available information or scientific data showing that the activity is, or for a purpose, not detrimental to the survival of the species or subspecies involved and/or their habitat. For this purpose, the Secretary shall regularly update wildlife information through research.

SEC. 7. Sharks in Captivity – No person or entity shall be allowed possession of a shark unless such person or entity can prove financial and technical capability and facility to maintain said specie: Provided, That the shark was not obtained in violation of this Act, and the source of stock is verifiable in order that mortality can be monitored accurately. The DA-BFAR will develop husbandry and holding tank standards as well as a permitting system for the keeping of sharks in captivity.

Provided further, that sharks in rescue and rehabilitation centers and those undergoing rehabilitation and acclimation shall not be subjected to commercial public exhibition.

SEC. 8. Human-Shark Tourism and Research Interaction Guidelines. – The DA-BFAR, within one (1) year after the effectivity of this Act, shall develop Human-Shark Tourism and Research Interaction guidelines in captivity as well as in the wild.

These guidelines shall be developed and regularly updated in accordance with existing regulations.

SEC. 9. Research Interaction – The DA-BFAR, within one (1) year after the effectivity of this Act, shall develop research and researcher interaction guidelines for studies focusing on sharks, rays and chimaeras.

SEC. 10. Non-Detriment Findings (“NDF”) –The DA-BFAR, within three (3) years after the effectivity of this Act, shall determine the NDF for targeted and incidentally caught shark species. The NDF for targeted shark species and those affected as bycatch shall be determined according to sustainability of harvest.

SEC. 11. Collection and/or Possession of By-Products and Derivatives. – The collection and possession of shark, ray and chimaera species shall only be allowed when the results of the NDF show that, despite the extent of species collection, the population of such species can still remain viable and capable of recovering in numbers. For this purpose, the DA-BFAR shall establish a schedule and volume of allowable harvests.

SEC. 12. Handling and Release Practices. – The DA-BFAR within one (1) year after the effectivity of this Act, shall develop acceptable fisheries handling and release guidelines for all types of protected and/or unwanted sharks, rays, and chimaeras based on the best available science and safe release experience.

SEC. 13. Bycatch reduction measures and reporting mechanisms. – The DA-BFAR, within three (3) years after the effectivity of this Act, shall provide technical and financial assistance on research for gear restriction, and identify modified fishing gears to reduce shark bycatch mortality. The DA-BFAR shall also develop a standard reporting system for sharks that are bycatch. Measures may include, but will not be limited to bait restrictions, use of different fishing hooks, varying hook depth, use of repellents, reducing soak time, and reducing the number of hooks.

SEC. 14. Release and Reporting of Bycatch. – Live sharks that have not been assessed through the NDF shall be immediately released unharmed to the sea. Dead sharks shall be handed over to the DA-BFAR for proper documentation and dismissal. Any incident must be reported to the competent authority using the standard reporting system.

ARTICLE II

PROTECTION OF VULNERABLE, THREATENED, ENDANGERED, AND CRITICALLY ENDANGERED SHARK SPECIES

SEC. 15. Determination of Threatened Species – The DA-BFAR, within two (2) years after the effectivity of this Act, shall determine whether shark species or subspecies of a population or subpopulation is threatened (vulnerable, endangered, or critically endangered) based on available scientific data and with due regard to internationally accepted criteria, such as the International Union for Conservation of nature (“IUCN”). Criteria include the following:

- a. Present or threatened destruction, modification, or curtailment of its habitat or range;
- b. Over-utilization for commercial, recreational, scientific, or educational purposes;
- c. Inadequacy of existing regulatory mechanism; and
- d. Other natural or man-made factors affecting the existence of sharks.

The DA-BFAR shall review, revise and publish the list of categorized threatened sharks within two (2) years after effectivity of this Act. Thereafter, the list shall be updated regularly or as the need arises: Provided, that a species listed as vulnerable threatened shall not be removed there from within three (3) years following its initial listing.

Upon filing of a petition based on substantial scientific information of any person seeking for the addition or deletion of a species from the list, the DA-BFAR shall evaluate in accordance with the relevant factors stated in the first paragraph of this section, the status of the species concerned, and act on said petition within a reasonable period.

The DA-BFAR shall also prepare and publish a list of sharks which resembles so closely in appearance with listed threatened wildlife, which species shall likewise be categorized as threatened wildlife.

ARTICLE III COMMERCIAL AND MUNICIPAL FISHERIES

SEC. 16. Identification of Critical Habitats. – The DA-BFAR within one (1) year after the effectivity of the Act, shall identify critical habitats for sharks and establish these as shark sanctuaries. This includes zones in marine protected areas and marine key biodiversity areas where appropriate conservation management measures shall be introduced.

SEC. 17. Development of Target Reference Points (“TRP”) and Limit Reference Points (“LRP”). – The DA-BFAR shall, within three (3) years after the effectivity of the Act, determine TRP and LRP based on the results of national stock assessments and precautionary principle.

SEC. 18. Catch Ceiling Limitations. – The DA-BFAR may prescribe limitations or quotas on the total quantity of shark captures, for a specified period of time and specified area based on the best available evidence, harvest strategies, and target limits. Catch ceilings may be established upon the concurrence and approval or recommendation of the agency and the concerned LGU in consultation with the Fisheries Aquatic and Resource Management Council (FARMC) for conservation or ecological purposes.

SEC. 19. Establishment of Closed Season. – The Secretary may declare, through public notice in at least two (2) newspapers of general circulation or in public service announcements, whichever is applicable, a closed season in any or all Philippine waters outside the boundary of municipal waters and in bays, for conservation and ecological purposes; Provided, That the declaration shall not be made five (5) days before the start of such closed season; Provided, however, That the declaration shall be done only upon the concurrence and approval or

recommendation of the concerned LGU and FARMC: Provided further, That in municipal waters, fishery management areas and other areas reserved for the use of the municipal fisherfolk, closed season may be established by the concerned LGU in consultation with the FARMC for conservation or ecological purposes. The FARMCs may also recommend the establishment of closed seasons in municipal waters, fisheries management and other areas reserved for the use of the municipal fisherfolk.

SEC. 20. Support to Fisherfolk involved in Shark Fishery. – The DA and LGUs shall provide support to commercial and municipal fisherfolk through appropriate technology and research, credit, production and marketing assistance such as, training for additional/supplementary livelihood.

ARTICLE IV TRACEABILITY

All business operators identified in the in supply chain of shark trading and utilization shall cooperate with the DA-BFAR in carrying out official controls, and shall have responsibilities including the following:

SEC. 21. Implementation of Traceability System. – Business operators must operate traceability procedures for ingredients, raw materials at all stages of production, processing, transport, storage and distribution, and be able to:

- i. identify any person or business operator that has supplied them with the species;
- ii. identify any person or business to which they have supplied their products;
- iii. the products that were supplied including quantity or volume, site of fishing grounds, species, and fishing gear used; and
- iv. make this information available to DA-BFAR and their consumers.

SEC. 22. Labeling or Identification. – Business operators must ensure that their products are adequately labeled or otherwise identified through relevant documentation. They must also comply with the labeling requirements of the country destination.

CHAPTER V ILLEGAL ACTS

SECTION. 23. Illegal Acts. – Under this Act, it shall be unlawful for any person to willfully and knowingly undertake the following acts:

- a. Killing, taking, keeping captive, and trading vulnerable, threatened, endangered, or critically endangered species, except in the following instances;
 - i. When it is done as part of the rituals of established tribal groups or indigenous cultural communities;
 - ii. When the shark is afflicted with an incurable and/or communicable disease;
 - iii. When it is deemed necessary to put an end to the misery suffered by the shark; and
 - iv. When the shark is killed or destroyed after it has been used in authorized research or experiments.
- b. Inflicting injury which cripples and/or impairs the reproductive system of sharks;
- c. Disturbing and harassing sharks and their habitats;
- d. Effecting any of the following acts in critical habitats:
 - i. Dumping of waste products detrimental to sharks;
 - ii. Squatting or otherwise occupying any portion of the critical habitat;
 - iii. Mineral exploration and/or extraction;
- e. Introducing, reintroducing, or restocking of shark species without permits;
- f. Finning;
- g. Collecting, hunting, possessing, importing, exporting, or re-exporting sharks, their by-products and derivatives without the result of the NDF and fully traceability at all stages, from collection to production, processing, transport, storage, and distribution;
- h. Falsely advertising or mislabeling any product, which could mislead consumers;
- i. Obstruction corridors used by sharks;
- j. Use of shark line and wire trace; and
- k. Commercial exhibition of live sharks in captivity that are undergoing rehabilitation.

CHAPTER VI
FINES AND PENALTIES

SEC. 24. Fines and Penalties. –

- a. Killing, taking, keeping in captivity, inflicting injury, harassing, and trading vulnerable, threatened, endangered, or critically endangered species:
 - i. Imprisonment of two (2) years and one (1) day to four (4) years and/or fine of Thirty Thousand (P30,000.00) Pesos to Three Hundred Thousand (P300,000.00) Pesos per animal if inflicted or undertaken against vulnerable species;
 - ii. Imprisonment of one (1) year and one (1) day to two (2) years and/or fine of Twenty Thousand (P20,000.00) Pesos to Two Hundred Thousand (P200,000.00) Pesos per animal if inflicted or undertaken against other threatened species;
 - iii. Imprisonment of four (4) years and one (1) day to six (6) years and/or fine of Fifty Thousand (P50,000.00) Pesos to Five Hundred Thousand (P500,000.00) Pesos per animal if inflicted or undertaken against endangered species;
 - iv. Imprisonment of six (6) years and one (1) day to twelve (12) years and/or fine of One Hundred Thousand (P100,000.00) Pesos to One Million (P1,000,000.00) Pesos per animal if inflicted or undertaken against species listed as critically endangered.
- b. Inflicting injury which cripples and/or impairs the reproductive system of sharks: imprisonment of one (1) month and one (1) day to six (6) months and/or fine of Five Thousand (P5,000.00) Pesos to Twenty Thousand (P20,000.00) Pesos, if inflicted or undertaken against other wildlife species;
- c. Disturbing or harassing sharks and their habitats: imprisonment of one (1) month and one (1) day to six (6) months and/or fine of Five Thousand (P5,000.00) Pesos to Twenty Thousand (P20,000.00) Pesos, if inflicted or undertaken against other wildlife species;
- d. Effecting acts in critical habitat(s): For illegal acts under paragraph (e) of the preceding section, the following penalties and/or fines shall be imposed: an imprisonment of one (1) month and one (1) day to eight (8) years and/or fine of

Five Thousand (P5,000.00) Pesos to Five Million (P5,000,000.00) Pesos shall be imposed.

- e. Introducing, reintroducing, or restocking of shark species without permits: an imprisonment of one (1) month and one (1) day to eight (8) years and/or fine of Five Thousand (P5,000.00) Pesos to Five Million (P5,000,000.00) Pesos shall be imposed.
- f. Finning:
 - i. Upon a summary finding of administrative liability, the owner, operator, boat captain and master fisherman of the vessel, or the chief executive officer in a corporation, or the managing partner in a partnership shall be punished with confiscation of the catch and fishing gears, and a fine three (3) times the value of the catch or the value indicated below, whichever is higher:
 - 1. Twenty Thousand (P20,000.00) Pesos for municipal fishing: Provided, That if the offender fails to pay the fine, he shall render community service;
 - 2. Fifty Thousand (P50,000.00) Pesos for small-scale commercial fishing;
 - 3. One Hundred Thousand (P100,000.00) Pesos for medium-scale commercial fishing;
 - 4. Five Hundred Thousand (P500,000.00) Pesos for large-scale commercial fishing;
 - ii. Upon conviction by a court of law, the offender shall be punished with imprisonment of two (2) years and one (1) day to six (6) years and fine equivalent to twice the administrative fine, confiscation and forfeiture of fishing gear and catch.
- g. Collecting, hunting, possessing, importing, exporting, or re-exporting sharks, their by-products and derivatives without the result of the NDF and full traceability, at all stages, from collection to production, processing, transport, storage, and distribution:
 - i. Failure on the part of the shipping or forwarding company from whose possession the fish or fishery species imported or exported are discovered or seized to fully cooperate in the investigation conducted by concerned government authorities shall create a presumption that there is connivance

or conspiracy between the shipping company and the shipper to perpetrate the aforementioned offense.

- ii. Upon a summary finding of administrative liability, the offender shall be punished with an administrative fine of five (5) times the value of the specie or Three Hundred Thousand (P300,000.00) Pesos to Five Hundred Thousand (P500,000.00) Pesos, whichever is higher, and forfeiture and/or destruction of the species.
- iii. Upon conviction by a court of law, the offender shall be punished with eight (8) years and one (1) day of imprisonment and fine of twice the administrative fine, forfeiture and/or destruction of the species: Provided, That offenders shall be banned from being members or stockholders of companies currently engaged in fisheries or companies to be created in the future, the guidelines for which shall be promulgated by the Department.

h. False advertising or mislabeling any product which could mislead consumers;

- i. Failure on the part of the shipping or forwarding company from whose possession the fish or fishery species imported or exported are discovered or seized to fully cooperate in the investigation conducted by concerned government authorities shall create a presumption that there is connivance or conspiracy between the shipping company and the shipper to perpetrate the aforementioned offense.
- ii. Upon a summary finding of administrative liability, the offender shall be punished with an administrative fine of five (5) times the value of the species or Three Hundred Thousand (P300,000.00) Pesos to Five Hundred Thousand (P500,000.00) Pesos, whichever is higher, and forfeiture and/or destruction of the species.
- iii. Upon conviction by a court of law, the offender shall be punished with eight (8) years of imprisonment and fine of twice the administrative fine, forfeiture and/or destruction of the species: Provided, That offenders shall be banned from being members or stockholders of companies currently engaged in fisheries or companies to be created in the future, the guidelines for which shall be promulgated by the Department.

i. Obstruction corridors used by sharks;

- i. Upon summary finding of administrative liability, the offender shall be punished with an administrative fine of One Hundred Fifty Thousand (P150,000.00) Pesos to Five Hundred Thousand (P500,000.00) Pesos,

dismantling of the obstruction at the expense of the offender, and the suspension or revocation of the permit or license.

- j. Use of shark line and wire trace:
 - i. Upon a summary finding of administrative liability, the owner, operator, boat captain and master fisherman of the vessel, or the chief executive officer in a corporation, or the managing partner in a partnership shall be punished with confiscation of the catch and fishing gears, and a fine of three (3) times the value of the catch or the value indicated below, whichever is higher:
 - 1. Twenty Thousand (P20,000.00) Pesos for municipal fishing; Provided, That if the offender fails to pay the fine, he shall render community service;
 - 2. Fifty Thousand (P50,000.00) Pesos for small-scale commercial fishing;
 - 3. One Hundred Thousand (P100,000.00) Pesos for medium-scale commercial fishing;
 - 4. Five Hundred Thousand (P500,000.00) Pesos for large-scale commercial fishing;
 - ii. Upon conviction by a court of law, the offender shall be punished with imprisonment of two (2) years and one (1) day to six (6) years and fine equivalent to twice the administrative fine, confiscation and forfeiture of fishing gear and catch.
- k. Commercial exhibition of live sharks in captivity that are undergoing rehabilitation:
 - i. Upon summary finding of administrative liability, the offender shall be punished with an administrative fine of One Hundred Fifty Thousand (P150,000.00) Pesos to Five Hundred Thousand (P500,000.00) Pesos, dismantling of the obstruction at the expense of the offender, and the suspension or revocation of the permit or license.

SEC. 25. Escalation Clause. – The fines herein prescribed shall be increased at least ten percent (10%) every three (3) years to compensate for inflation and to maintain the deterrent function of such fines.

CHAPTER VII MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS

SEC. 26. Flagship Species. – LGUs shall initiate conservation measures for endemic and/or economically valuable species in their areas. For this purpose, they may adopt flagship species such as the whale shark (*Rhincodon typus*) or thresher shark (*Alopias pelagicus*), which shall serve as emblems of conservation for the local government concerned.

SEC. 27. Implementing Rules and Regulations. – Within twelve (12) months following the effectivity of this Act, the Secretary of the Department of Agriculture, in coordination with the Department of Trade and Industry, Department of Tourism, and the Committees on Environment and Ecology of the Senate and the House of Representatives, respectively, shall promulgate respective rules and regulations for the effective implementation of this Act. Whenever appropriate, coordination in the preparation and implementation of rules and regulations on joint and inseparable issues shall be done by the Departments. The commitments of the State to international agreements and protocols shall likewise be a consideration in the implementation of this Act.

SEC. 28. Appropriations. – The DA shall immediately include in the Department's program the implementation of this Act, the funding of which shall be included in the annual General Appropriations Act.

SEC. 29. Information and Education. – The BFAR, DENR, DOT, DTI, LGUs, and other academic institutions shall undertake a nationwide information and education campaign to adequately inform the populace of the value of sharks and rays in the marine ecosystem, and of the importance of preserving their respective habitats and feeding grounds.

SEC. 30. Separability Clause. – If any section or provision of this Act is held unconstitutional or invalid, the remaining sections or provisions with the provisions not affected thereby shall continue to be in full force and effect.

SEC. 31. Repealing Clause. – All laws, decrees, executive orders, rules and regulations, issuances or parts thereof inconsistent with the provisions of this Act are hereby repealed or modified accordingly.

SEC. 32. Transition Period. – Due to the substantially new requirement imposed by this Act, a transition period of three (3) years from its entry into force is provided.

During the transition period, sharks, their by-products, and derivatives may be sold and traded, and stocks that have been produced before the end of the transitional period may continue to be sold or exported until exhausted.

SEC. 33. Effectivity. – This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in the Official Gazette or in a newspaper of general circulation.

Approved,