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SUSTAINABLE FISHERIES MANAGEMENT PROJECT (SFMP)

FWG Meeting with GNCFC and
NAFPTA on NFMP and
postponement of closed season



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Cover photo: Director of research at the fisheries commission delivering an opening statement. He is surrounded by other directors of the commission. (Credit: Friends of the Nation)

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ACRONYMS

FEU	Fisheries Enforcement Unit
FiC	Fisheries Commission
FoN	Friends of the Nation
GAR	Greater Accra Region
GNCFC	Ghana National Canoe Fishermen Council
MoFAD	Ministry of Fisheries and Aquaculture Development
NAFPTA	National Fish Processors and Traders Association
SFMP	Sustainable Fisheries Management Project

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

On Saturday 4th August 2018, 113 fisher folks -made up of 77 men and 36 women- were engaged to discuss fisheries management, specifically, closed season. This was in connection with a declaration by the Ministry of Fisheries and Aquaculture Development (MoFAD) to close fishing activities from 7th August to 4th September, 2018. The closure was expected to be complied with; by all fishing fleets except Tuna vessels. This was a bold decision from the government and a major step to rebuilding the marine fish stock. However, the biggest responsibility is to ensure compliance of this closed season by all fishers including artisanal fishers.

For this reason, Friends of the Nation (FoN) under the USAID-funded Sustainable Fisheries Management Project (SFMP) supported MoFAD to engage with some fisher folks from the four coastal regions of Ghana.

1.1 Objective of the meeting

The objective of the meeting is to share information on the closed season and other fisheries management strategies with fishers for their collaboration and support for the implementation of the closed season and other fisheries management measures to contribute to rebuild the marine fish stock especially the small pelagics. However, prior to the meeting, it was announced on radio that the ministry has postponed implementation of the closed season to next year 2019. The meeting took a different form of an objective to discuss how the next steps should be.

2.0: OPENING SESSION

There were opening remarks from some directors from Fisheries Commission (FiC). In their opening remarks, they hinted that the only thing that does not change is change itself. “We as humans are not static, but change every now and then”, Mr. Scott Apewudza, Greater Accra Regional (GAR) director of Fisheries Commission (FiC) reiterated. The directors informed the house that the feedback they are getting is that engagement with resource users have not been adequate enough. For this reason, the government has paid a listening attention to the outcries of citizens and has therefore rescind its decision to implement the closed season this year. This meeting therefore seeks to start a long-term engagement between the fisheries managers i.e. FiC, and the resource users to conscientize their people to better organise themselves for a long-term preparation, Mr. Tsibu added and concluded that “it is better at this point in time to reflect and think about the way forward”.

A brief power-point presentation was delivered to remind the fishers of the need for fisheries management. Mr. Emmanuel Dovlo and Mad. Matilda Quist who presented this session hinted on the Fisheries Act 2002, Fisheries (Amendment) Act 2014, Fisheries Regulation 2010 and the Fisheries (Amendment) Regulation 2015. They educated the participants that these legislations provide for sustainable exploitation of fishery resources and development of the industry under policy directions from the ministry and implementation and technical support from the fisheries commission.



Figure 1: Mr. Godfred Tsibu, director of MCS admonishing fishers to prepare themselves adequately for 2019's closed season implementation. On his left is Mr. Emmanuel Dovlo of the research unit of FiC and to his right is Mr. Scott Apewudza, Greater Accra director of FiC



Figure 2: Mr. Emmanuel Dovlo and Mad. Matilda Quist, educating participants on the fisheries laws governing the sector

3.0 CONCERNS ON POSTPONEMENT OF CLOSED SEASON IMPLEMENTATION

The fishers who were present at the meeting expressed some grievances upon hearing that the closed season implementation has been postponed abruptly. President of the National Fish Processors and Traders Association (NAFPTA), Madam Regina Solomon expressed worry about the cancellation of the closed season at the eleventh hour by the Fisheries Minister without engaging the fisherfolks who advocated for its implementation. This she said has caused great distress and puts them in a bad light, noting that it will be difficult and shameful for them to go back to their members to explain why it has been cancelled. Some other participants also questioned whether the fisheries commission was playing its constitutionally mandated role effectively. They could not fathom why the commission has been lecturing them on why Ghana's fisheries has been on the decline over the last two decades without explaining the measures they as a commission has put in place to arrest the situation.

They participants challenged the notion that the declining fisheries resources was due to illegal fishing by artisanal canoe fishermen. They however advised that the commission should ensure that there is effective arrest of saiko fishing (transshipment) by resourcing the fisheries enforcement unit (FEU) to be able to effectively enforce the fisheries laws. The fishermen admonished themselves, especially the chief fishermen present to ensure voluntary compliance within their jurisdiction as the President of the Nation while sympathising with the plight of the fisher folks indicated that illegal fishing would no longer be countenanced.



Figure 3: Madam Ruby Adukpo, a NAFPTA representative from Volta Region making her submissions



Figure 4: Representative of the western regional GNCFC making his submissions

4.0 NEXT STEPS AND THE WAY FORWARD

It was agreed by all present that this current engagement will serve as the first engagement with fishers' representatives towards the 2019 closed season implementation, and that reference will be made of this day should fishermen resist the move in 2019 with the excuse of not being adequately engaged. Fisheries commission officials were also advised not to wait until the time is due that they will re-engage the fishers. It should be a continuous engagement so that issues of alternative livelihood sources could be well-thought through. The fishers advised them to collaborate effectively with non-governmental organisation, especially Friends of the Nation (FoN) which has been engaging them effectively since time immemorial. All the participants pledged to send this message back to their various constituents.