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Philippines tightens blue swimming crab fishing rules to safeguard exports and marine biodiversity

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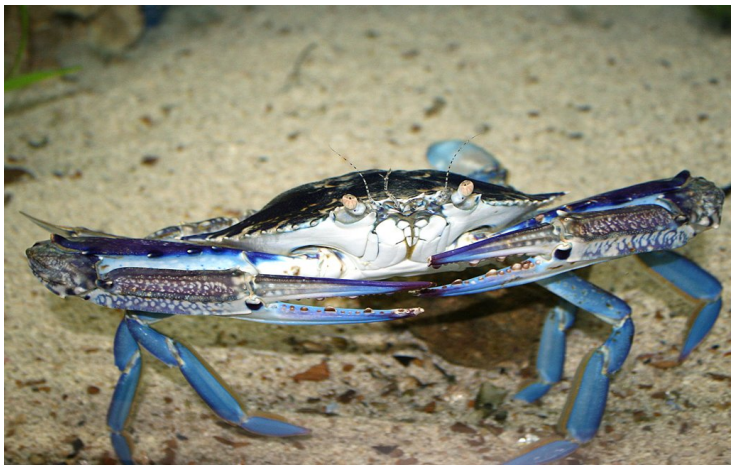
New fisheries regulations align the country's crab industry with international sustainability standards, strengthening access to premium seafood markets



The Philippine government has introduced stricter regulations for its blue swimming crab fishery, seeking to strengthen marine conservation while safeguarding one of the country's most valuable seafood export industries. The Department of Agriculture (DA), through the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR), has issued Fisheries Administrative Order (FAO) No. 277, establishing new fishing standards designed to improve sustainability, protect marine biodiversity and maintain access to premium global markets.

At the centre of the new regulation is a 500-metre cap on the aggregate length of gillnets used in blue swimming crab fishing operations. Scientific studies cited by BFAR indicate that the restriction significantly reduces the accidental capture of marine mammals and other protected, threatened and endangered species without compromising fishing efficiency, allowing conservation goals to be achieved alongside continued commercial harvests.

The policy represents a strategic move as seafood-exporting nations face increasingly rigorous environmental requirements from international buyers. By adopting stronger fisheries management practices, the Philippines aims to align its blue swimming crab industry with the standards set under the US Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA), a key benchmark for seafood exports to the United States.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco P. Tiu Laurel Jr. said the reforms reflect the government's commitment to balancing economic growth with responsible resource management.

"Our blue swimming crab industry supports thousands of fisherfolk, processors, exporters and their families. By embracing better fisheries management, we are protecting our marine resources while ensuring Philippine seafood continues to meet the high standards of premium international markets," Laurel said. "Sustainability is no longer just an environmental objective. It is a business imperative."

Beyond gear restrictions, the administrative order introduces stronger compliance and governance measures. BFAR, working alongside local government units and fisheries law enforcement agencies, will intensify monitoring and enforcement activities. The regulation also establishes administrative penalties for violations and mandates a comprehensive review every three years to ensure the framework remains responsive to evolving environmental and industry conditions.

The new policy follows extensive consultations involving local governments, fishing communities, seafood processors, scientists, conservation groups and other industry stakeholders, reflecting a collaborative approach to fisheries governance.

BFAR National Director Elizer S. Salilig said stakeholder participation will be central to achieving long-term sustainability. "With better management and the active participation of our fishing communities and industry partners, we can protect our marine resources while securing livelihoods and maintaining access to global markets," Salilig said.

The reforms are also expected to reinforce the Philippines' standing in one of its most important seafood export destinations. According to Undersecretary for Fisheries Drusila Bayate, the new framework strengthens the country's efforts to restore and sustain market access in the United States, where sustainability standards continue to shape seafood procurement decisions.