

Govt gears up to better prevent illegal fishing

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by LOVELY A. CARILLO

SOLDIERS inspect vehicles at a checkpoint along Quimpo Boulevard as part of City Hall's efforts to better secure this city. ARJOY M. CENIZA



The Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) is banking on the national implementation of the Fisheries Law Enforcement Management Information Management System (FLEMIS) to make strengthen campaign ver-sus illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (IUUF).

“FLEMIS is a com-puter-based system that aims to provide a

more efficient documentation, preparation of the case and filing of the case for mari-time law enforcers,” Nilo S. Katada, deputy chief of BFAR’s Fisheries Re-source Protection and Law Enforcement Section-Quick Response Team (FRPLES-QRT) said in an interview.

Katada said the sys-tem is patterned after the manual of operation used by law enforcers against all illegal fishing activities but it requires some training for the Fisheries law enforce-ment personnel since it makes use of a computer. Training for Luzon and Visayas were completed in July while training for Mindanao was completed early this month.

The FLEMIS is useful in all four scenarios usually encountered by fisheries law enforcers namely seaborne operation, market denial, landing denial and mobile checkpoints that are necessary when checking marine resources.

“With normal docu-mentation it takes us three to five days to complete the documentation neces-sary to file a case against IUUF violators. But with this system, we can com-plete all documentation in just one day,” he said.

There are numerous forms required to be filled up before the Bureau can file a case against an illegal fisher, he added. But the system duplicates every-thing fast including all important information, so it is more efficient.

The system was developed by BFAR personnel at the central office to be used by BFAR fisheries enforcers and other deputized agencies all over the country. The system, which took two years to complete, was patterned after the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), an agency within the US Department of the Interior.

“The US Department of the Interior helped us in creating the system but this was adapted to the Philip-pine scenario by the Fisheries Information Management Center,” Katada said.

While the FLEMIS is ready, it is still on a testing stage pending the output of the consultations which will be incorporated in the system so that it responds to the needs of the country’s law enforcers.

Katada said they conducted a hands-on training for the would-be users so they can immediately communicate their feedback to the It experts who helped create the system. FLEMIS will be launched hopefully within the year.

He added that one of the most common problems of fisheries law enforcers is the preparation of documents to support the case. With FLEMIS, the law enforcers can immediately file the case after apprehension of the violator.

The system is also seen as an important tool in discouraging corruption since the Central Office can have access to all IUUF activities reported by law enforcement units in the regions. These are immediately and automatically reflected in the database so it is easy to monitor the status of these cases.

The agency is however faced with challenges in the implementation of the system. For now, it will be implemented only within the Bureau with plans of sharing it with selected law enforcement agencies. Agency sources say they have to ensure that the system can be used both online and as a stand-alone system for use even in the patrol boats.

Katada said there is a plan to create a system similar to the Law Enforcement Management Information System (LEMIS) being used by the US for its Fish and Wildlife Services. But in time, the program will not only be used for the enforcement of fisheries laws but will also be used by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources and the National Prosecution Service for monitoring and law enforcement purposes.

He said there is already an agreement between these agencies and the US International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Bureau to allow Filipino developers to learn about the American system first-hand.

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