

ADDRESS BY HON. MRS. MAVIS HAWA KOOMSON, MINISTER FOR FISHERIES AND AQUACULTURE DEVELOPMENT AT THE 2023 CLOSED SEASON STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AT THE CLOGSAG AUDITORIUM, ACCRA ON 13TH APRIL, 2023

The Hon. Deputy Minister

The Chief Director

The Executive Director, Fisheries Commission

The Chief of Party, USAID GFRA

Representation of the NAFAG

Representation of the GNCFC

Representation of the GITA

Representation of the GIFA

Representation of the NAFPTA

Representations from Academia

Representatives from CSOs and other Development Partners

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am happy with the discussions that have taken place after the presentation of the Report on the 2022 Closed Season (CS). This morning's meeting has become necessary as it forms part of activities to engage stakeholders on the outcome of the 2022 Closed Season to inform the implementation of the 2023 Closed Season for the fisheries sector. I therefore wish to express my profound gratitude to you all for taking time off your schedules to be part of this programme today.

The fishery resources have been the economic backbone of the many fishing communities in this country for centuries, especially artisanal fishers and fish processors. It is therefore important that, we manage our fisheries sustainably to promote the wellbeing of these communities.

As we are all aware, the fisheries sector is threatened by depletion or decline of fish stocks as shown by low catches confirmed by fishers in recent surveys. This decline in catches is as a result of climate change, Illegal, Unregulated and Unreported (IUU) fishing, excessive fishing capacity and overfishing among other factors.

The implementation of the Closed Season, is part of the series of strategies to recover fish stock and ensure sustainable management of the fisheries resources. We have all come to accept that, there is the need to continue the Closed Season within the same period of July and August as implemented in 2021 and 2022, since it is the period of the upwelling. Upwelling is the best period for spawning.

Studies have also shown that most fishers rely on fishing as the main source of their livelihood and therefore, any adverse effect on fishing could affect livelihoods among fishing communities.

Therefore, the Ministry and its partners, including the Ghana Fisheries Recovery Activity has launched the alternative livelihood training support for fishers starting with five hundred and fifty (550) fishers in masonry, carpentry, dressmaking, hairdressing, electronics and auto engineering etc in selected Communities along the coast. This training would be scaled up to cover 8,000 fishers aged from 18 to 35years. After the training, trainees would be supported to set up to ensure that they can earn incomes from their trade.

The Ministry during the 2022 Closed Season distributed 20,000 bags of rice and 8,333 oil to totally support fishers during the closure. As we have always indicated, the relief items are not sufficient to whole support the fishers during the one (1) month Closed Season. We therefore, encourage fishers to save towards the period. I must also mention that, the fishers

have been supported with 6,000 wire mesh, 20,000 basins, 1710 chest Freezers and 1150 outboard motors.

I wish therefore, to thank the good people in the fishing communities for the show of solidarity for government to address the problem of declining fish stocks.

I know that fishers are now relieved that the premix fuel distribution has resumed since March, 2023. To curb the issues of middlemen, hoarding among other issues, I would be commissioning twenty (20) of the completed premix automated outlets in different locations in the country. It is anticipated that by the end of the year majority of the sites would have been completed and dispensing fuel.

We have all discussed and agreed again today that, any closed season gains will not be realized if we all do not collectively combat IUU fishing activities. The Ministry would therefore, continue to empower the Fisheries Enforcement Unit to curb any illegal activity. I also wish to mention that the Ministry will pilot the use of Electronic Monitoring System on trawl vessels this year. We thank the Ghana Fisheries Recovery Activity Program for funding and technical assistance for this pilot.

Let me also mention that, we have also changed the gear for the trawl vessels to reduce bycatch and landings of juveniles. I have also directed that trawl vessels can be at sea for not more than 30 days for any fishing expedition.

The Monitoring, Control and Surveillance Division will continue to use the Vessel Monitoring System, which is already in place to monitor the activities of fishing vessels at sea. We are also discussing the best model for Landing Beach Enforcement Committees (LaBEC) to ensure that the right things along our beaches by fishers.

The Ministry is further engaging the neighbouring countries in the sub-regional level of the West Central Gulf of Guinea (FCWC) to come onboard with implementation of the Closed Season at the same time.

To conclude, I want to thank our gallant fishers and development partners for your continuous support in implementing the Closed Season and our stock recovery efforts. I am certain that, if we continue this for sometime we will reverse the dwindling trend of our fish stock.

It is on this note that, I hereby officially announce the 2023 Closed Season

Canoe and Inshore Fishers will observe the Closed Season from 1st - 31st July 2023.

Industrial Trawlers will also observe the Closed Season from 1st July To 31st August 2023.

Thank you and God bless us all.