

FISHERIES REGISTRATION AND LICENSING: A MANAGEMENT TOOL?

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Introduction

At present, the coastal ecosystems are under stress from the combined effects of human overexploitation and habitat destruction. Catch per unit effort for the total small pelagic fish catch from municipal fisheries in the Philippines has declined dramatically from 1948 to present (DENR, 2001). Coastal population is steadily growing due to increasing birth rate and in-migration. Without proper intervention, the continuing degradation of coastal resources and decline in fish catch poses a grave threat to food security and will result to greater poverty.

To address this issue, one viable strategy in fisheries management is the registration and licensing system. It can potentially serve as a means for regulating access to fisheries resources to ensure their viability, integrity, and sustainability. The local government units were vested with authority to register and grant licenses to fisherfolks, fishing vessels, and fishing gears. However, the registration and licensing system is beset with numerous issues and challenges which hinder its implementation as an effective management tool.

This study was undertaken to evaluate the effectiveness of the system of registration and licensing of fisherfolks, fishing vessels, and fishing gears in selected coastal municipalities of Panay Island and to identify problems and gaps of its implementation as a management tool. It is premised on the fact that it is only when sufficient baseline information have been established and evaluated through studies that the system can effectively served as a valuable management tool and will provide good basis for decisions to manage municipal fisheries.

Methodology

Primary data were gathered through the following methods: a survey through an interview schedule that was conducted through the assistance of trained field enumerators from the area; a key informant interview that includes employees of the local DA Office and FARMC officers who are directly involved in the system or process of implementing the registration and licensing system; and focus group discussion wherein preliminary results of the study were presented and validated with the stakeholders in the study sites.

Results and Discussion

Identification of the study sites was done based on the records of the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) Region 6 Office. Per province, the municipality with the highest number of registered fisherfolk was chosen to be one of the study sites. In the same manner, the barangay with the highest number of fisherfolk in the said municipality was identified as the specific study area. Table 1 shows the identified municipality and the specific barangay where the survey of the study was conducted.

Table 1. Study Sites

Study Sites			Total Number of Fisherfolk Respondents
Province	Municipality	Barangay	
Iloilo	Concepcion	Polopiña	312
Aklan	New Washington	Pinamuk-an	333
Capiz	Roxas City	Culasi	526
	TOTAL		1171

Fisheries Registration and Licensing Process

Fisheries registration and licensing are one of the tools of regulating entry to the fishery resource to avoid overexploitation of the resource base and to limit resource-use conflicts. Municipal fisheries registration and licensing is largely embodied in the Philippine Fisheries Code (RA 8550). In addition, the LGUs of the three study sites have also passed their respective Municipal Fisheries Ordinances (MFOs) which contains registration and licensing, as well as the schedule of fees for the permits and fines and penalties for violations.

Fisherfolk Registration

Fisherfolk, as defined by RA 8550, include people directly and/or physically engaged in taking and/or culturing and processing of fishery resources. Section 18 of the Fisheries Code provides that all fisheries related activities in the municipal waters shall be utilized by municipal fisherfolk and their organizations as listed in the registry. This provision underscores the need for the fisherfolk to register with their respective LGU. Fisherfolk just need to secure and accomplish the form which is available in their barangay hall or in the local DA office.

Fishing Gear Licensing

A municipal fishing gear license is a permit to use a specific type of fishing gears within the municipal waters for a certain period. It is provided in the MFOs of the three LGUs that even simple gear like fish pot and hook and line need to be licensed. Fees vary from Php2.00 (per unit of fish pot) to Php1,200.00 (per unit of lift net). The fishing gear license need to be renewed annually. The process usually involves four local government offices: Barangay Treasurer, Municipal Agriculture Office (MAO), Municipal Treasurer's Office (MTO), and Municipal Mayor's Office. The basic requirement common to the LGUs includes obtaining of Community Tax Certificate (CTC) and Barangay Clearance (provides proof of residency in the barangay for a minimum of 6 months). The Barangay Fisheries and Aquatic Resource Management Council (BFARMC) also plays an important role in the process. The fisherfolk is required to secure first a certification from BFARMC that their gear is non destructive and not illegal. The office of the MAO will then counter check and verify whether the gear is properly constructed (in case of stationary gears) or not. This is to ensure that gears used are permitted and follows the zoning plan being implemented by the municipality.

Fishing Boat Licensing

The boat need to be registered as a pre-requisite for obtaining a license. Registration is an instrument for generating an inventory of the number of vessels operating within a given

municipality. The MFOs of the three sites require the motorized and non-motorized boats to be licensed before they can operate in the municipal waters.

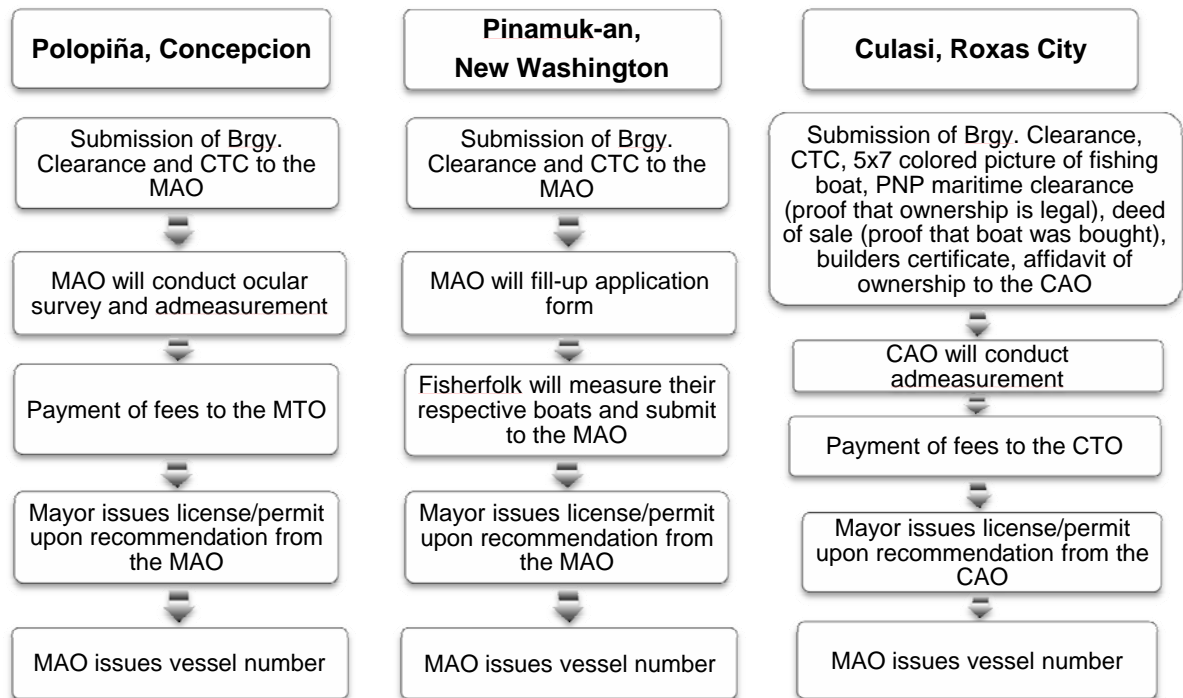


Figure 1. The fishing boat licensing process

Executive Order 305 devolved the registration of municipal fishing vessel 3 GT and below to the LGUs; the function was previously delegated to the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG). A boat should renew its license annually but registered only once, unless ownership changes or major alterations are made (Implementing Rules and Regulations, EO 305). However, de facto, the “merged” process of registration and licensing is done annually. This is shown in the case of the three study sites. This factor can be attributed to the lack of database or poor data management of the LGUs involved, making it difficult for them to retrieve records on who have registered or not. To make it convenient for them, they also re-register the boat every time the operators/owners renew their license. This practice has implications on the veracity of the LGUs data on actual number of boats registered in the municipality.

Data in figure 1 shows that in New Washington, it is the fisherfolks themselves who measure their respective boats and submit this data to the MAO who will then compute using the prescribed formula. This practice may produce unreliable data and might lead to giving of license for boats to operate within the municipal waters even if they are actually more than 3GT. Dubiously registering fishing boats lower than its actual gross tonnage has been a longstanding issue and constant monitoring and inspection is needed to curb this practice (Alesna et.al. 2004).

Compliance Rate

Compliance rate is roughly calculated as the total number of registered fisherfolk divided by the total number of respondents. Data reveals that for both Polopiña and Pinamuk-an, majority of the respondents claimed to be a registered fisherfolk of their municipality; though the percentage of compliance is higher in Polopiña, Concepcion. However, in the case of Brgy. Culasi in Roxas City, about 70% of the respondents have not applied for registration.

This high percentage of non-compliance is attributed to the fact that most of the respondents are employed as crew of fishing boats who claimed they were not informed of the need to register with the local DA office. On securing the licenses for the fishing gear and the fishing boat, it is also Polopiña who has a higher percentage of compliance. This high compliance in Concepcion is evident of the effective campaign and strategy of the local DA Office. They set-up a supplementary mobile registration in a form of “one-stop-shop” in the island barangay. In this way, the fisherfolk does not need to go anymore to the municipal hall located in the mainland. This saves time and effort for both the LGU and the fisherfolk.

Fisherfolk’s compliance is usually determined by the economic gains of breaking the rules compared to the risk of being detected (Nielsen 2003). Common reason for non-compliance is they lack financial resources or the fees are just too expensive for them. They also complain of the tedious process involved and the many supporting documents required. Data also shows that the respondents were not fully informed of the process and who are required to comply. While fishers clamour for lower rates, some researchers believed that the present license fees are still greatly undervalued and do not reflect the appropriate resource rents (Alesna et.al. 2004). The fees for licenses should at least offset the cost of management of the resource through collecting a resource rent from what is legally a common property resource (Trudeau 2004). What is the basis for determining the fair resource rent and who will set the fees is still an issue that needs to be addressed.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Results of the study in the three sites shows that process for the registration and licensing system may vary from one LGU to another and there is no standard procedure. Except for the LGU of Concepcion, compliance rate for fisherfolk registration, fishing gear licensing and fishing boat licensing is generally low. The study had also demonstrated that the “one-stop-shop” strategy of bringing the registration team to the people can increase fisherfolks’ compliance. The municipal fisheries registration and licensing system is backed with sufficient enabling policies, from the national level down to the local level. However, there is still much to be done for its effective implementation. Drawn from the experience of the three sites included in this study, the following are some of the policy recommendations being proposed to improve registration and licensing system as a fisheries management tool.

Determine the carrying capacity of the resource as basis for limiting entry. Registration and licensing system is seen as a viable strategy for regulating access. However, interview done with the stakeholders in the three study sites showed that the LGUs did not set a limit on the number of licenses they grant. In fact, anybody from the municipality can obtain a license upon presentation of the necessary documents and payments of fees. This practice does not take into account the capacity of the fishery resources to support all registered and licensed fishers. At present the carrying capacity and the Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) of the coastal resource in the area were not yet established. For this reason, LGUs claim they do not have basis on setting limit on the number of issued license. There is, therefore, an urgent need for studies to establish this knowledge gap as a basis for limiting entry to the resource.

Standardize the procedure. There appears to be no standard procedure in fisheries registration and in securing fisheries license. The three municipalities have their own set of forms and process. Implementing a standard procedure for all coastal areas will improve efficiency of the system and minimize “red tapes” on transactions.

Establish fair basis for license fees. The general complain on high fees and costly documentary requirements are seen to be the major reason for non-compliance. The perceived high fees appear to support the notion that the LGUs view fisheries registration and licensing system as a revenue-generating exercise rather than as a management tool. The fees for licenses should at least offset the cost of management of the resource through collecting a resource rent from what is legally a common property resource (Trudeau 2004). There is therefore a need to compromise and adjust the amount into a fair level wherein the subsistence fishers can afford without compromising the value of the resource rents.

Improve compliance monitoring and enforcement. For easy monitoring, vessel marking and color-coding of fishing boats should be strictly enforced. Low compliance can also be attributed to the low knowledge of the fisherfolks on the provisions of their respective MFOs. A good information, education and communication (IEC) program of the LGU on fisheries registration and licensing will be able to address this problem.

Provide funds for the establishment and maintenance of databank. Results of the study show that all of the three sites have poor databanking mechanism. Fisherfolk registry and the list of those who have secured for license are mostly entered in the logbook only. Since data is difficult to retrieve, it is also almost impossible to use them as a basis for sound policy decisions. There is therefore a need for the LGUs to appropriate funds necessary for the infrastructure to support and maintain a database for the registry and to provide trained personnel to man it.

The above recommendations are being proposed to improve the fisheries registration and licensing system as management tool and to distribute access rights fairly. Pomeroy (1995) elucidated that resource conflicts can be diminished when access rights are distributed more effectively and equitably. However, these access rights should be availed without compromising the capacity of the resource. This is to prevent the scenario that Hardin (1968) have written about which goes “Ruin is the destination towards which all men rush, each pursuing his own best interest in a society that believes in the freedom of the commons”.

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