

**STATEMENT TO THE HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT
BY THE HONOURABLE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES**

REGARDING SUPPORT TO THE FISHERIES SECTOR

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 3, 2020

Madame Speaker, the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted fish production and the fisheries value chain with varying negative impacts. Losses from both local and overseas markets have resulted in higher input costs causing significant increases in operational expenses. It is estimated that the fisheries sector may lose up to US\$23.1 million during 2020, due to COVID-19, as per the following breakdown:

- Capture Fisheries - US\$20.9M
- Aquaculture - US\$2.2M

Madame Speaker, while the basic production systems are still intact with most small scale fishers and fish farmers still being able to produce and sell at farm gate, the contraction has had the contingent effect of slowing down production operations. Similarly, there has been an increase in the cost of input materials such as mesh wire for fishers and chemicals required for aquaculture that must be imported from overseas. Also, because of the drop in the sales of fish and bad weather, many fishers are going offshore less frequently resulting in loss of fishing gear.

These factors have resulted in increases in the unit cost of production per fish sold. To improve productivity in the sector, some level of recapitalization will be necessary for both fishers and fish farmers.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (MOAF) on the recommendation of the National Fisheries Authority (NFA), has undertaken the following strategic initiatives to assist the sector during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Strategies:

- 1. Working with the Ministry of Health and the Attorney General Chambers, to continue to facilitate the coordinated movement for fisheries sector workers in areas subjected to COVID-19 restrictions. This includes fishers, fish farmers, fish farm workers, fish vendors, fish processing workers, and other fishing industry support workers. The NFA will provide identification cards for these workers free of cost for the first year.***

Status:

- i. As a result the COVID-19 Enforcement Measures were amended through the Disaster Risk Management Act, The Disaster Risk Management (Enforcement Measures) (No. 4) (Amendment) Order, 2020, to reduce the restrictions on fisheries sector workers. The Second and Third Schedules were amended to exempt “Persons employed/engaged to/in catching, landing, or processing of fish pursuant to a licence or permit issued under the Fisheries Act. The amendment became effective on April 28, 2020.
 - ii. In addition to the normal processing of Identification Cards to artisanal fishers, the NFA has to date processed and issued Identification Cards to approximately 106 fish farmers and fish farm workers across 24 fish farms during the month of May 2020, free of cost. Identification cards were also provided to Fish Vendors from the St. Catherine fishing beaches. The estimated cost of providing these cards was just under \$300,000.

- 2. Provide production incentives for Aquaculture and Commercial Fishing operations through an allocation of J\$120 Million to fishers and fish farmers.***
 - i. Approximately 260 fishers from St. Catherine and St. Mary fishing beaches that were subject to lockdowns in April and May respectively, and were unable to go to sea, will receive grants in the form of vouchers with a total value of \$8 Million. They would have lost or suffered damages to their fishing equipment that were at sea during the period and were thus

unattended to. These include primarily trap fishermen, and some net and line fishers.

- ii. Approximately 4,740 licensed fishers across 137 fishing communities will benefit from grants in the form of vouchers with a total value of \$67 Million. Each fisher will be provided a voucher valued at approximately \$15,000.00, to be used to purchase fish mesh wire or equivalent fishing gear.
- iii. Fish Farmers in the aquaculture production areas who had challenges in procuring feed and fish fingerlings, will receive grants in the form of vouchers with a total value of \$20 Million. Approximately 72 registered NFA farmers adhering to good production practices with a minimum one acre of ponds will benefit under this initiative.
- iv. The Ornamental Fish Producing Sub-sector will receive just over \$1 m to facilitate the provision of feed (brine shrimp) to breeders, fish feed and support for infrastructure development.

In summary the following provisions are being made:

PROPOSED COVID-19 RELIEF / PRODUCTION INCENTIVE TO THE FISHERIES SECTOR		
Category and Activity	Beneficiaries	Value
Capture Fisheries		
• Mesh wire (or equivalent) for fishers in St. Catherine and St. Mary impacted by lockdown	260 fishers	\$8.0 Million
• Mesh wire (or equivalent) as relief &/or incentive for small scale fishers impacted by COVID-19	4,740 fishers	\$75.0 Million
• Cold storage containers for strategic fishing beaches island wide to enhance value chain support		\$24.0 Million
Sub-Total		\$107 Million
Category and Activity	Beneficiaries	Value
Aquaculture		
• Fish Feed for fish farmers impacted by COVID-19	72 farmers	\$10 Million
• Fingerlings for fish farmers impacted by COVID-19	72 farmers	\$10 Million
• Feed and Equipment for ornamental fish farmers impacted by COVID-19	20 farmers	\$1.0 Million
Sub-Total		\$21 Million
TOTAL		\$128Million

Methodology to implement grants

Capture Fishers

Approximately 4,740 licensed fishers across 137 fishing communities are to benefit from grants of \$75M. The following strategy will be employed:

- A. Approximately \$30 Million of the grant will be distributed through those Members of Parliament with fishing communities in their constituencies.
 - Each fisher will be provided with a voucher valued at \$15,000.00
 - Vouchers will allow fishers to redeem fishing gear or material only from participating entities and are therefore not redeemable for cash.
 - Each MP will be allocated between a minimum of \$510,000 up to a maximum of \$1.5M, the amount to be decided on, pro-rated by the number of registered fishers in each of the constituencies.
- B. \$45 Million will be distributed through the National Fisheries Authority under the Fisheries Incentive Programme that will similarly distribute vouchers valuing \$15,000 to registered fish farmers, through the NFA offices islandwide.

Other Categories

All the other interventions will be administered by the NFA.

The requisite systems are in place to ensure that no one individual can benefit more than once from any of the two methods.

3. Madame Speaker, we have not forgotten about our industrial fishers. A strategy is being developed for a support package for that category, who have not only been severely impacted by COVID, but also have suffered tremendous losses from the two years of enforced closure of the conch fishing industry. We will announce more on the support to this category later.

Allow me, Madam Speaker to highlight some of the other initiatives being pursued by my Ministry. In addition to the foregoing, we are in the process of procuring cold storage containers to be placed on strategic fishing beaches island wide to enhance value chain support. This will cost the Government \$24M.

Also, under the approximately US\$5.0M World Bank funded Promoting Community - Based Climate Resilience in the Fisheries Sector project, the Ministry through the NFA continues to increase the adoption of climate resilient practices among targeted fishing and fish farming communities in Jamaica.

Through this partnership, as recently as Friday a brand new fully equipped enforcement vessel valued at US\$168,000 was commissioned. This will allow the NFA to provide greater support to our stakeholders to better monitor our fisheries and strengthen the NFA's enforcement efforts.

Madam Speaker, I fully understand that there is need for many more interventions within the sector, as I would have learned from my recent series of listening tour meetings with fisherfolk island wide. In this regard, I continue to work with my technical teams to construct a much more comprehensive approach to the sustainable development of the sector that will allow for more far-reaching interventions as we strive towards a sustainable fisheries sector.

Madam Speaker, it is important to highlight that all these benefits are being made available to registered/licenced fishers. I, therefore, use this opportunity to encourage all of our fishers to become registered with the National Fisheries Authority.