

New plan to safeguard Seychelles' food security

Seychelles Fishing Authority will introduce new measures to safeguard food security in Seychelles as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact every single sector of the economy, including fisheries. The plan was unveiled in a live press conference by the Minister of Fisheries and Agriculture, Charles Bastienne on Monday, 30 March 2020.

by N. Esparon

The new plan will ensure that the artisanal fishermen will still have a job during this time of uncertainty and also guarantee a market where they will be able to sell their daily catch. One of the main concerns of late for the fishermen was 'where will they sell their fish?' since all businesses including hotels and restaurants have shut down. The plan follows numerous discussions between Seychelles Fishing Authority (SFA), Seychelles Fishing Boat Owners Association (FBOA), Seychelles Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI) and the Ministry of Fisheries and Agriculture to discuss ur-

gent measures and assistance for the fisheries sector.

Bastienne stated that the plan is to target the artisanal fishermen, also known as demersal fishermen but does not necessarily include fish trap fishermen or those that use nets to catch fish. All fishermen planning to take part in this new programme will have to register with the SFA as part of the required criteria. This will ensure that SFA will have better visibility on how many fishermen will ultimately take part in this programme. Besides, all processing businesses that will also be taking part in this programme will have to register with the local fishing authority, SFA, explained Bastienne.

"In total there are around seven

[fish] processors that we have met to discuss and agree with this new plan. Once the artisanal fishermen have returned



Beatty Hoareau (left), Minister Bastienne (centre), Cyril Bonnelame (right)

with their catch, they will be able to sell their fish to these processors at an agreed and guaranteed price. Even before they go out to sea, the fishermen will know how much they will get for their catch. The processors will then process the fish into consumer products such as fillets, slices, to name a few and these products will then be professionally vacuum-packed and priced for sale. At this point of the cycle, these consumer products will then be transported to Seychelles Trading Company (STC) who will be responsible in distributing these products across the various selling outlets on Mahé, Praslin and La Digue. Agreement between SFA and

Continued on page 2

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Continued from page 1

SCCI is already in place where shops will make available space for these fish products in the various outlets to ensure accessibility for everyone in the com-

munity," explained Bastienne.

He also pointed out the ongoing measures the government will be implementing to give financial assistance to fishermen

with their ever-increasing operational cost. "All ice for artisanal fishermen will now cost SCR15 per 60kg bag, a 50% reduction. Besides, SFA will now take over

the responsibility of selling bait to fishermen at SCR5 per kilogram compared to SCR16 per kilogram being sold previously." When questioned as to how exactly will SFA be able to achieve that, CEO of SFA, Cyril Bonelame affirmed that SFA has already begun discussions with purse seiners that will sell them by-catch such as bonitos at an affordable price which will then

be used as bait.

The government will also provide financial assistance to the fish processors in the form of a loan not exceeding SCR1million at 1% through the Fisheries Development Fund, which they will be able to apply for. "We will also be able to fast track these loans should the need arise. This will ensure the processors will be able to buy the

fish from the fishermen thus keeping the cycle moving," he said.

For semi-industrial fishermen whose focus is mainly on the export sector, for which currently there is no market, Minister Bastienne noted that they will be able to apply for assistance through the financial assistance programme announced by the Ministry of Finance.