

Senator Sarauw Says DPNR's 'Blanket' Fishing Moratorium Lift is Threat to Local Fishermen

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Senator Janelle Sarauw in a statement Thursday said the V.I. Department of Planning and Natural Resource's [decision to lift a fishing moratorium](#) poses a threat to local commercial fishermen.

Said Ms. Sauraw: "The blanket lifting of the moratorium on commercial fishing licenses poses a potential threat to our local commercial fishing community. Although there is a need for licenses to become available for non-licensed local fishermen and women to fully participate in the industry, an arbitrary lift is simply not the way to go about it.

"In June of 2021, my office hosted a series of townhalls throughout the Territory in this regard. The purpose of the townhalls was to glean the obstacles the fishing community faced within the industry and holistically address them. There were a myriad of issues presented by the fishers and

helpers that attended. Some of those issues fell within the jurisdiction of the local government, while others required advocacy on the federal level.

“To hastily address one issue for the sake of short gains without putting in place measures to prevent the exacerbation of other issues is not responsible. Our penchant for acting without properly planning continuously puts the Territory in the precarious position of reacting to foreseeable errors that arise,” states Senator Sarauw.

"Based on the information garnered from the fishing community, the Fisheries Advisory Committees, and best practices related to the preservation of our natural resources, BR 21-0225 was drafted and seeks to lift the moratorium with a numerical limit on the licenses, based on studies conducted to determine the appropriate number to bolster our fishing industry, all the while preserving the future of said industry. The lift, according to the bill, would have mandated a merit-based application process that is inclusive of [non-licensed] local fishermen and women who have been contributing to the industry over the years.

"This blanket lift provides no protection for the already established local fishing community, and if such measures are not put into place, we can see commercial licenses being approved for any “Johnny come lately” or those with already established financial means. Has DPNR established the appropriate number of licenses necessary to prevent overfishing in our already ecologically fragile waters - the impetus behind the moratorium placement? Let’s not shortchange our local fishermen and women in the industry under the guise of progress.

"It is my hope that the Department of Planning and Natural Resources utilizes a system of parity and local inclusion in their commercial fishing licensing process."