

Suriname clears air on fish exports to US

Govt says ban applies to catch from Venezuelan vessels



Red snappers from Suriname. CMC

Suriname has denied reports that the Dutch-speaking Caribbean country will no longer be allowed to export fish to the United States.

In a statement, the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Husbandry and Fisheries (LVV), said the ban applies exclusively to the Surinamese coastal driftnet fishery (SK driftnet fishery) and to catches caught by vessels sailing under the Venezuelan flag.

“All other fisheries will continue to have access to the US market,” the ministry said.

The ministry said it felt compelled to inform the public correctly after recent reports incorrectly stated that Suriname is completely barred from exporting fish to the US.

“This information is incorrect and creates a distorted picture of the situation,” the ministry said.

The United States applies the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) to the import of fish and fish products, requiring exporting countries to

demonstrate that their fishing practices have measures comparable to those in the US for the protection of marine mammals, such as dolphins.

The assessment is known as a comparability finding and is conducted by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

The authorities said Suriname has received a positive comparability finding for almost all fisheries, with the exception of the SK driftnet fishery.

NOAA said, "The net lengths used in this fishery do not comply with US regulations and that insufficient measures had been taken to prevent marine mammals from becoming entangled in the nets."

The LVV said Suriname has since taken various corrective measures, and implementation is in full swing, noting, for example, that the use of acoustic deterrent devices, known as pingers, have been made mandatory to keep dolphins at bay.

"In addition, net lengths are being adjusted to current standards, and a comprehensive monitoring programme is being developed," the ministry said.

It added that this programme will be reinforced with Electronic Monitoring (EM), which allows catches and fishing activities to be digitally recorded and monitored."

The ministry acknowledged that these measures entail additional costs for the sector, and it is actively seeking funding and collaborative programmes to provide support where possible.

The LVV added that the US has prohibited the export of red snapper caught in Surinamese waters by Venezuelan vessels.

"Although these vessels operate from Suriname, they fly the Venezuelan flag. Venezuela, as the flag state, is responsible for requesting a comparability finding, but has not yet submitted an application or provided any information to the US authorities. As a result, fish from these vessels cannot be exported to the US," the ministry said, adding that it is closely monitoring developments in Venezuela and continues to focus on consultation and cooperation to find solutions.