

Ms Monica Atukuta, a resident of Kira Road in Jinja City, expressed con-

of nine deaths daily, making drowning a significant public health crisis.

In response, Swim Safe Uganda has launched a three day National Life-

Prevention campaign. The organisation's chief executive officer, Moses Kalanzi, said the training intends

to educate the public on the importance of water safety in case of emergencies," he said.

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BY DAVID SEKAYINGA
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The government has officially launched the process of selecting indigenous fishermen to take charge of managing Lake Victoria's resources. This comes a month after President Museveni dissolved the existing fisheries management committees.

In a December 26, 2025 directive announcing the dissolution of the committees, the acting Director of Defence Public Information, Col Chris Magezi, ordered the formation of new structures composed of indigenous fishermen and investors.

According to the letter, the formation of the new committees will be overseen by the Deputy Chief of Defence Force and Inspector General, Lt Gen Sam Okiding, alongside the Chief of Defence Intelligence and Security, Maj Gen Richard Otto.

The Kalangala Resident District Commissioner, Mr Fred Badda, last week said: "Our office has been directed to start the process of identifying credible indigenous fishermen to serve on the new Fisheries Management Committees from the district level down to the landing site or village level."

He added that selected fishermen must be experienced, trustworthy, actively involved in legal fishing, and passionate about protecting the lake resource.

Committee composition

According to documents seen by this publication, five-member vetting committees will be established at every sub-county and district level to scrutinise landing site committee members. The District Security Committee will then forward the names for approval, in a process overseen by UPDF authorities.

Under the proposed structure, each landing site committee will comprise a chairperson aged 50 years and above who must be a boat owner plus a female vice chairperson aged 50 years and above involved in fishing. The other members include a publicity and mobilisation officer, youth representative, a security and defence representative, a general secretary, and a women representative.

The committee members will serve two terms of two years each but people

Govt to restore L Victoria control to local fishermen



View of Nkese Landing Site in Bubeke Sub-county, Kalangala District. PHOTO/DAVID SEKAYINGA

who served on the dissolved committees are not eligible for reappointment.

Mr Badda said the new committees will be tasked with enforcing stricter fishing regulations aimed at curbing illegal fishing and restoring declining fish stocks.

"Among their duties will be preventing the use of illegal fishing gear and destructive fishing methods, banning the use of strong solar-powered lights for night fishing, and ensuring that all fishermen possess valid permits issued by the fisheries office," he said.

The guidelines further propose outlawing fishing in designated breeding zones, capping the number of boats per landing site at 66, and limiting individual fishermen to a maximum of 10

Expectations.
Committee members should know that they are here to serve, not to earn a salary. If they fight illegal fishing practices, they will benefit from increased fish catches, otherwise, they will be penalised.
Mr Joseph Ssenkunbugu, a fisher-

boats per landing site. There will also be mandatory registration and numbering of all boats for security and monitoring purposes, while prohibiting permanent structures within 200 metres of the shoreline.

These reforms come amid longstanding concerns over illegal fishing practices, declining fish stocks, and allegations of corruption within previous enforcement structures involving soldiers of the UPDF Fisheries Protection Unit (FPU).

Response from fishermen

Mr Joseph Ssenkunbugu, a fisherman at Kasenyi Landing Site in Mugoye Sub-county, Kalangala District, welcomed the reintroduction of indigenous fishermen-led committees, but blamed past failures on the defunct FPU.

"These indigenous fishermen committees worked well in the past, but were let down by soldiers under the

FPU. Some officers took bribes from the arrested and released them," he said.

He claimed that previous committees were often selected by the FPU and included individuals who extorted money from fishermen.

"I am glad they were dissolved," he added. Mr Ssenkunbugu, however, urged the government to set clear penalties for committee members who fail to perform or solicit bribes from illegal fishers.

"Committee members should know that they are here to serve, not to earn a salary. If they fight illegal fishing practices, they will benefit from increased fish catches, otherwise, they will be penalised," he said.

He also asked the government to allow the landing site committees to arrest perpetrators and strengthen enforcement against illegal fish trade routes.

"They [government] should close all routes used to transport illegal fish to markets and stop the importation of illegal fishing gear. Then, the lake will recover very quickly," he added.

Mr Aloysius Akiiza, a fisherman at Nakatiba Landing Site, said many fishermen are optimistic about the new plan, but expressed concern about possible job losses.

"We see good times ahead and agree to move in the new direction. However, I am worried that many of our people may lose jobs because reducing the number of boats per landing site means fewer opportunities," he said.

He noted that restoring fish stocks could ultimately benefit households economically, citing that a five-kilogramme of Nile perch costs about Shs80,000.

"That is enough to support a home. If these measures can restore fish stocks, we have no objection," he said.

Seasons

According to fisheries experts, Lake Victoria has two major peak breeding seasons: March to May and July to August. Veteran fishermen agree that reviving old practices could help restore the lake.

Traditionally, fishermen respected natural cycles of wind and moonlight, suspending fishing when the winds were too strong or when the moon was too bright.

However, that will only work if illegal markets, both local and across the common borders are dismantled, and local leaders are empowered.

BACKGROUND

The indigenous-led management model was first requested by the fishermen three years ago, arguing that the Fisheries Protection Unit (FPU) had failed to protect the lake.

FPU came into existence after illegal fishing reached alarming levels in 2017. It is mainly composed of UPDF soldiers and aims to crack down on illegal fishing on water bodies. Uganda's fishing business re-

lies primarily on capture fishing from its large lakes, particularly Lake Victoria, which supplies the majority of fish for export (Nile perch and tilapia) and domestic markets (Mukene).

Aquaculture is also a growing sector, with a focus on tilapia and catfish, serving as an important alternative to declining natural fish stocks. The sector is a vital source of income and food security for many Ugandans, but faces challenges like illegal fishing and over-

fishing.

Experts in the sector warn that depleted Nile Perch and silverfish stocks are hurting local incomes and undermining Uganda's fish export industry.

Although the work of FPU has been commended by a section of stakeholders in the fisheries sub-sector, many politicians and fishermen have criticised them over their high-handedness in dealing with people suspected of engaging in illegal fishing.