Non-resident fishermen barred from Kalangala

Without the Kalangala District identification number, fishermen risk arrest and losing their boats when found fishing within the district's waters.

BY DAVID SSEKAYINGA

Authorities in the island district of Kalangala have announced a crackdown on non-resident fishermen operating in the district's waters, warning that boats without Kalangala identification numbers will be confiscated and skippers arrested.

Mr Fred Badda, the Kalangala Resident District Commissioner (RDC), said the move is part of a broader plan to restore the dwindling fish stocks in Lake Victoria.

"People engaged in illegal and legal fishing are all poor because of low fish stock. Therefore, we will not allow fishermen from neighbouring districts like Masaka, Mpigi, Mukono, and Wakiso to fish in Kalangala waters without the Kalangala District identification number," Mr Badda said during an interview on Wednesday.

Mr Badda said Kalangala has invested a lot in safeguarding its natural resources and will not tolerate what he described as "exploitation by outsiders".

"We shall be monitoring and making patrols on the lake, especially along our borders with other districts and countries. We shall confiscate a boat without our district identification number," he said.

He advised leaders of neighbouring districts to share responsibility for conserving their waters rather than relying on Kalangala.

The RDC revealed that about 25,000 silver fish boats operate in Kalangala District, each allegedly destroying between 5,000 and 10,000 juvenile Nile Perch per fishing trip.

"If in one month, no such boats operate, over 200 billion young Nile Perch would be saved, hence replenishing the fish stock," he claimed.

Across the district's seven sub-counties and 65 gazetted landing sites, seven-member committees, largely made up of indigenous fishermen, have also been instituted to protect the lake.

"The operations of these committees shall be independent. However, they will be helped by the army when called upon," Mr Badda said.

According to the new guidelines, any committee member who never reports or conceals information about illegal fishing activities risks imprisonment.



The fishing community prepare their nets at Misonzi Landing Site, Kalangala District on November 19,2025. PHOTO/ DAVID SSEKAYINGA

BACKGROUND

The Fisheries Protection Unit (FPU) was involved in fighting illegal fishing. However, in 2023, fishermen demanded that the lake be handed over to them to manage after a continuous increase in illegalities under the FPU command. In December 2025, President Museveni issued a directive that led to the dissolution of all landing site committees that were established by the FPU and restructured the FPU. His directive was communicated in a letter by the Acting Director of Defence Public Information, Col Chris Magezi, dated December 26, 2025. The letter announced that the dissolved committees will be replaced by new ones composed of representatives of indigenous fishermen and investors. It further showed how the formation of the new committees will be overseen by the Deputy Chief of Defence Forces and Inspector General, Lt Gen Sam Okiding, and the Chief of Defence Intelligence and Security, Maj Gen Richard Otto, within three months.

FPU was renamed to 155 Marines Battalion placement under the command and administration of the UPDF Marines Brigade. Maj Joseph Ssebukeera was appointed Commanding Officer of the new battalion, while Brig Michael Nyarwa was commanding the UPDF Marines Brigade.

Kalangala District Fisheries Officer, Mr Adrian Kavuma supported the crackdown, saying destructive silverfish gear is wiping out young Nile Perch stocks.

"Over 150 million small Nile Perch are destroyed with the current silver fish gear," he said, urging fishermen to adopt the less destructive 'chota chota' method.

On the excess number of boats at landing sites, Mr Kavuma said authorities will strictly enforce licensing limits. He said the 66 boats to be licensed per landing site will help reduce overfishing.

Mr Kavuma said after a boat has been allowed by the landing site committee, the Fisheries office shall process the license. He urged the landing site committees to thoroughly vet boats before forwarding them for licensing.

Mixed reactions from fishermen

Some fishermen have welcomed the reforms. Mr Jolly Ssemanda, the elected chairperson of the Bujumba Sub-county Fisheries Committee, said local fishermen have long awaited decisive action.

"We know each person involved in illegal fishing. We are commit... teaching them the right met... fishing," he said.

However, others raised concern... the selection process of com... members.

Mr Richard Katumba, a fisher... at Kisaba Landing Site in Kya... Sub-county, criticised what he descr... as a top-down approach.

"They selected [committee mem... beginning from the district to vill... level, which I think is danger... because there is no structure ... begins from top to bottom," he said.

He also questioned the legal basi... the new guidelines, saying while w... are awaiting the new Fisheries a... Aquaculture law, they are seeing ... guidelines issued.

"We really do not know whether th... are part of that law," he said.

Mr Frank Zimbe, a fisherman at Tuk... Landing Site in Mugoye Sub-county, ... fishermen's involvement in protecti... the lake is a step in the right direct... but cautioned against excessi... military control.

"The last committees we had worke... but were overpowered by the soldier... If the soldiers only offer support but d... not lead, these new committees will d... their job," he said.

He added that some elected member... on the committee, previously involve... in illegal fishing, could reform.

"They were only involved in it b... because it was the only way to survive ... the law comes into force, they can com... clean," he said.

Mr Badda said as they enforce the ne... guidelines, fishermen are likely to s... short-term losses.

"The plan is to return Lake Victoria ... to its former glory so that fishermen ... can earn from their sweat. We request ... all fishermen to be calm, those who ... have something to eat should lend a ... hand to others who will have nothing ... as we wait for the six months to see the ... results," he said.

Daily Monitor has learnt that the ... wider plan to save Lake Victoria, which ... begun in Kalangala District, will spread ... to other districts that share the lake and ... also all water bodies across the country.

"We expect these committees to begin ... their work by next week," the RDC said.

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