

'President's fish' facing extinction in Philippines

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This photo, released by the Philippine Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR), shows a lobed river mullet, *Cestraeus plicatilis*, locally known as "ludong" or "banak." The species, reputed to be one of the favourite dishes of former president Ferdinand Marcos, is facing extinction in the Philippines because it is so valuable, a fisheries official said Saturday.

A species of mullet reputed to be one of the favourite dishes of former president Ferdinand Marcos is facing extinction in the Philippines because it is so valuable, a fisheries official said Saturday.

The high value of the lobed river mullet, popularly known as "president's fish" has resulted in overfishing, seriously diminishing their numbers, said Jovita Ayson, a regional director of the fisheries bureau.

"It is a threatened species and we have to do something about it before it goes extinct. If we don't stop the indiscriminate catching, in a short

while, it could vanish," she told AFP.

The fisheries bureau is calling for a five-year ban on the catching of *Cestraeus plicatilis*, locally known as "ludong" or "banak".

It is found in only a few countries, and in the Philippines its habitat is limited to a few rivers in the north.

It sells for 5,000 pesos (114 dollars) a kilogram, which only the wealthiest can afford, making it the most expensive fish in the Philippines, Ayson said.

But this also leads fishermen to catch it even during its spawning season, not leaving enough mature fish to breed, she said.

"You cannot stop fishermen from catching it. It is too valuable. People even pay the fishermen in advance for their catch," she said.

The mullet grows to 32.5 centimetres (12.8 inches), but those being caught are now much smaller, weighing only 250 grams (8.9 ounces) from as much as 2.5 kilograms (5.5 pounds) a few years back, a sign fewer are reaching maturity.

Marcos, a native of the northern Philippines who ruled the country from 1965 to 1986 -- much of it under martial rule -- reputedly always had a year-long supply of the fish stocked away, Ayson said.

"A lot of people like the smell. It has a unique aroma and a special taste," she said, explaining the demand.

The fisheries bureau is experimenting on breeding the [fish](#) in captivity and educating the local populace on the need to keep it from dying out, Ayson said.

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