

Fish species can fight dengue mosquitoes – expert

By JOJO RINOZA

DAGUPAN CITY, Pangasinan — With the controversy surrounding the anti-dengue vaccine, Dengvaxia, a fisheries expert suggested an approach to combatting the dangerous disease by attacking its carrier – the vector mosquito – using a fish species that feed on them at their breeding grounds.

Dr. Westly Rosario, chief expert at the National Integrated Fisheries Technology and Development Center of the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR-NIFTDC), advocates for this “biological” approach in winning the battle against dengue partly because it is also cheaper.

Rosario calls it the “mosquito fish” because it is a natural predator of mosquito larvae and as such lives in their breeding grounds.

But this fish species is known in Pangasinan as “Itar” or “Tuyong” in Ilocano and “Katapa” in Tagalog. Generally, males reach 1.5 in (3.8 cm) and females 2.5 in (6.4 cm). This fish is a livebearer species, and as such, the females are larger and more rounded than the males.

They eat large amounts of mosquito larvae that can reduce mosquito population and reduce the prevalence of diseases spread by mosquitoes.

“It is important to let the people know that we have a kind of fish that can live in places where the mosquitoes breed and

this for free,” he said.

In 2012, Dr. Rosario introduced the mosquito fish in Pangasinan as an alternative biological solution to battle the growing occurrence of dengue in the province.

But this was met with opposing views from the Department of Environmental and Natural Resources (DENR) claiming that mosquito fish is an “invasive species” and can be a threat to the environment.

“Although it is true that the mosquitofish is invasive in nature, it has been with us for so many decades and never it became a problem and for an instance, a threat to the environment,” Rosario said.

“In some parts of the country, it actually turned out to be a food source for some people. It is also at the food chain of many bird species,” he added.

A DENR