

Being at a Promising Phase of Blue Revolution, India must have a Union Fisheries Ministry for its Fisheries Development

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Focal Points at a Glance: The author, a reputed fisheries expert pleads for the setting up of a Union Fisheries Ministry in India.

The 'dormant' fisheries Sector of India is a vital food sector which needs to be made vibrant. It provides health food, eradicates malnutrition, alleviates poverty, enhances rural development, secures livelihoods of vulnerable and weaker sections of people, generates employment and income to them, besides contributing to exports. Even after over 60 years after Independence, the sector remains obscure. By realising the potential of the aquatic resources and harnessing them judiciously, the sector would generate additional food resources and contribute greatly to the economy of the country, thus taking the Nation closer to the Blue Revolution.

The promise of Blue Revolution can emerge as a total reality, when a separate Ministry of Fisheries and also a National Fisheries Mission at the Centre are formed.

Why a Separate Ministry for Fisheries?

The abundant, highly diversified and rich living and non-living resources of the ocean require a concerted and unified approach to rationally exploit them rather than in a piece-meal and scattered effort as at present under several ministries, departments and institutions. Some specific and important reasons why a separate Ministry of Fisheries is essential are given hereunder:

1) To give the fisheries sector a better deal and focus: Clubbed with the mammoth agriculture line, fisheries sector has no identity of its own, thereby losing the focus. Since the country has to depend more and more on aquatic food resources in future, only a special thrust under an exclusive fisheries ministry can

bring about the change, revolution and development. When several of the States have separate Ministries and departments, why not at the Centre?

2) To set a stage for fisheries and aquaculture revolution: The aquatic realm (sea, rivers, reservoirs, estuaries, lagoons, backwaters, brackishwaters, lakes, canals, ponds, tanks) is an enormous asset of the country. The potential has been, however, harnessed only partially. Water resources have to be put to use optimum sustainable level for fish production by protecting the aquatic ecosystems and utilisation of modern technology. A stage has to be therefore set for a fisheries and aquacultural revolution immediately.

3) To recognise and place the sector on equal footing with other food sectors: For want of due recognition and importance, the sector has not realised its full growth potential. Since it is also an equally important food sector, it has to be elevated and accorded an equal status as agriculture.

4) To instill professionalism into the sector: All along, the subject has been handled by bureaucrats, technocrats being subordinate to them. Since it is a highly technical subject, only professionally qualified specialists in fishery science in this country have to man the sector. A change from the present practice would augur well.

5) To integrate and coordinate all fisheries activities of the country: The activities of the sector are at present widely dispersed in several Central ministries, departments and institutions, resulting in dissipation of efforts and

wastage of funds. A unified approach under a single Ministry is essential for steady progress and growth of the sector. The new Ministry will have to coordinate with other Ministries for allied and related subjects.

6) To resolve the contentious issues between fisheries development and other developmental activities and international fisheries problems: Several fisheries problems including those of fishermen and fishing arise from time-to-time between the country and neighbouring countries, sometimes leading to destruction of properties, loss of life, arrest and detention of fishermen in other countries. Such issues have to be carefully examined and be solved amicably at the highest level in the country. Such sensitive issues can only be dealt with at the level of an exclusive Ministry for Fisheries for expeditious settlement. Poaching in the Indian EEZ by foreign fishing vessels is periodically reported and this requires constant vigil and surveillance.

Besides the above, several disputes regarding fisheries problems arise within the country and between the States often leading to clashes and destruction of infrastructure and properties. An exclusive Ministry for fisheries would be in a position to deal with such matters quickly and effectively in the interests of the Nation. Conflicts between the artisanal and mechanised fishing sectors also flare up without notice in different parts of the country, these have to be resolved fast. Imposition of bans and other restrictions on exploitation and conservation of aquatic resources generate controversies between fishermen and the concerned authorities. They have to be dealt with suitably. ☹☹

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