

## Ribbon fish mistaken for juveniles identified

K.A. MARTIN | KOCHI, MAY 3, 2016

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*The large volume of the catch was reported off the coast of Thiruvananthapuram*



Researchers at the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI) have identified a species of ribbonfish, which grows only up to 35 cm, as the ones being mistaken for fish juveniles by conservation activists and fishermen for the commercially important *trichiurus lepturus*, commonly called the largehead hairtail, which can grow up to a size of 235 cm.

The large volume of the catch of the smaller ribbon fish *trichiurus auriga*, called pearly hairtail, was reported off the coast of Thiruvananthapuram at a depth of 285 metres, the CMFRI report said. Around 10 tonnes of the smaller ribbon fish variety was caught in an expedition by 'Sagar Sampada' of the CMFRI in early December 2014.

Juvenile fishing is at the centre of a debate in Kerala, where dwindling fish resources off the State's coast has united arch rivals, traditional fishermen and mechanised boat owners, over the issue of self-regulation and restraint from growth overfishing. Recruitment overfishing and growth overfishing have been identified as serious causes for resource depletion.

The two segments of the marine fishing operations in Kerala joined hands in July 2015 for a historic agreement, with the State Fisheries Department as the third party, to end juvenile fishing and night-time fishing expeditions.

### **Loss for fisheries**

The State government had also stepped in to end juvenile fishing by prescribing minimum legal size for eight fish, four crustacean and two molluscan species, in July 2015. However, recent estimates by the CMFRI claimed that the marine fisheries sector may have lost over Rs.1,200 crore during the last calendar year to juvenile fishing of threadfin breams, a commercially important species in Kerala.

### **Dip in landings**

Figures for marine fish landings in the State during 2015 showed that ribbon fish landings in the State had dropped drastically during the year to 12,253 tonnes from 25,828 tonnes during 2014. Ribbon fish landings in 2013 were put at 34,223 tonnes.

The drop in ribbon fish catch in 2015 has been similar to what is seen in oil sardines.