

# *CMFRI brief throws light on 'fishy' method*

Policy on fishing with lights limits usage, regulates equipment

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Kochi, February 20

The Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI) has recommended guidelines for fishing using lights on Indian waters. This comes against the backdrop of conflict between traditional fisherfolk and operators of light fishing units on this age-old fishing method, which is widely practised in the Asia-Pacific.

CMFRI's Marine Fisheries Policy brief denies permission for light fishing within territorial waters (up to 12 nautical miles) to safeguard the in-

terests of traditional fishers, prevent conflicts, and protect coastal fish stocks.

While allowing light fishing outside territorial waters, the brief lays down certain conditions. It restricts the number of fishing vessels; regulates the power of lights used on board; and limits the number of days of purse-seine light fishing operations in a month.

The Policy has recommended banning the practice in April-May, when mackerels — which form a good percentage of catches in light purse-seines — spawn or prepare for it. It also calls for close monitoring of light fishing operations by the enforcement wing of maritime States.

The policy report, prepared by K Sunil Mohamed, Principal Scientist, Molluscan Fisheries

## **Fishing with lights**

- The method uses lights, above or under water, to attract fish. Typically, the fish spot the increased concentration of bait around the light, return regularly, and can be harvested in large numbers.

Division, CMFRI, also points out that widespread use of lights in purse-seine fishing in Goa and Karnataka has led to conflicts between traditional fisher groups and the operators of light fishing units.

The traditional fishers argue that using light fishing will affect the marine ecology of the region due to excessive capture of large spawning adults. The protests have forced the Goa

government to ban the use of LED and other light attractants in fishing practices within its territorial waters. There is also growing resentment in Karnataka against the practice, especially since it tends to catch high-value fishes.

This method has come into vogue at a time when the overall marine catches along the south-west coast has declined by 17 per cent and that in Goa by a steep 55 per cent, mainly due to the decline in oil sardine catches, the mainstay of traditional fishers.

Rather than an outright ban, it is egalitarian and reasonable if a regulated fisheries management regime is introduced, says the CMFRI brief. The regulatory regimes implemented by Japan and Korea are good examples in this regard, it adds.