

Panel on fisheries wants to stop registration of new vessels

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Kochi, July 17

AN EXPERT PANEL for the sustainable development of marine fisheries has recommended for stopping registration of new fishing vessels in Indian waters to tackle over-capacity in the sector, state-run Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI) sources said.

Aimed at implementing the Sustainable Development Goal-14 (SDG) of the United Nations in India, experts from marine fisheries, forests, environment, ocean development, industry, fisher associations and coastal zone management also recommended licensing scheme to fishing gear and boat building yards too.

India is the second largest fish producer in the world after China and accounts for nearly 6 % of global fish production.

Marine fish catch in the country has recorded a marginal increase of 6.6 % to

touch 3.63 million tonne during 2016, says a fish landing report released by CMFRI. Indian fish landing touched an all-time high of 3.94 million tonne in 2012 approaching the recommended potential of 4.4 million tonne from the Indian EEZ, officials said.

India stands seventh with regard to marine capture fish production in the world and the sector supports four million fishermen population.

Data from the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimated that a staggering 109 million tonne fish are caught each year worldwide. Overfishing has pushed a number of popular target species to the brink of collapse in recent decades.

Data available with the ministry of agriculture and farmers' welfare reveals that the number of mechanised vessels in 2012 stands at 72,550 as against the recommended fleet size of 32,231, a staggering excess of 125%. Total number of motorised vessels in 2012 stands at 60,218 as against

the recommended fleet of 71,313.

"The number of fishing vessels is well above the sustainable limit and it is impacting the livelihood of the people involved in fishing sector. The catch is dwindling and the need of the hour is regulation and restriction with consensus of all stakeholders," Charles George, state president of Kerala Matsyathozhilali Aikyaavedi said.

Many species are particularly vulnerable to over-fishing because of slow maturation, long life, sex reversal and spawning aggregations. Over-fishing and growing pressure on fish trade would eventually lead to their depletion, sources added.

Experts have also called for reviewing some of the existing subsidies in marine fisheries sector as a primary step to effectively manage marine resources. The subsidies which are leading to overfishing or illegal fishing should be eliminated for the sustainable development of marine fisheries, experts said.