



MARINE FISHERIES' VALUE ADDITION

Stakeholders vow joint campaign to secure MSC certification



Yemi Oloruntuyi, MSC programme head, speaking at the panel discussion held at the CMFRI on Thursday

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TERMINING the eco-labelling certification awarded by the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) crucial to bolster the export value of Indian seafood products, a panel of stakeholders decided to make joint efforts to obtain the certification.

The panel discussion held at the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI) here on Thursday agreed unanimous efforts are required to implement fishery improvement projects (FIPs) prior to meeting the standards for the MSC certification.

Organised jointly by the CMFRI, MSC and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), the meet finalised strategies for the fishery improvement plans for the country.

MSC Developing World Programmes head Yemi Oloruntuyi said maintaining sustainability of fisheries is crucial to increasing its acceptability in the international market.

"Sustainability has become the most important factor in seafood procurement in the international market. It provides a competitive advantage. The concept behind eco-labelling is to harness consumer power to usher in change in the fisheries sector. It involves assessment of ecological performance and promoting market support for sustainable seafood products. It provides a framework and pathway for fishery improvement," she said.

Sustainability of stocks, ecosystem impact and effective management are the three major factors required for fulfilling the MSC standards, said Yemi. "The environmental benefits of eco-labelling, include improved sus-

tainability of fish stocks, reduced bycatch, improvement of habitat and ecosystem, increased compliance with regulations and ecosystem-based management," she said. CMFRI director A Gopalakrishnan presided over the meet.

10 fisheries prioritised

Considering the commercial importance, 10 fisheries were prioritised by the panel as the targeted fishery for getting MSC certification. They include blue swimming crab, shrimp, red ring shrimp, squid, whelk, flower shrimp, cuttlefish, lobster, skipjack tuna and Japanese threadfin bream. Fishery improvement projects will be developed for these fisheries.

Presenting a road map for obtaining the MSC certification, CMFRI principal scientist K Sunil Mohammed said the certification will enhance the economic opportunities and market access for the country's fishing industry, in addition to enhanced international reputation for the quality of Indian fishery management.

'Sustainable Seafood Network' launched

A 'Sustainable Seafood Network' of 12 members representing CMFRI, CIFT, MPEDA, seafood industry, retailers, trawlers, traditional fishermen and NGO was also launched to accelerate the measures for maintaining sustainable practices in the seafood industry. Sunil Mohammed is the chairman of the network.

'Marine fisheries in a total mess'

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WHILE the workshop organised by CMFRI stressed on the need to obtain eco-labelling certification to bolster export value of Indian fisheries, many stakeholders expressed doubts regarding the implementation of the regulations. For the marine fisheries sector is in a mess.

"We have rules and regulations to control marine fisheries, but nobody is in control of the situation," said Vivekanandan, secretary of Fishmark, an NGO.

"Though we observe annual monsoon trawling ban, the results are questionable as the trawlers return to the sea with a vengeance to get maximum catch. The government sees the fishermen as a political constituency and is unwilling to implement the regulations.

"The MSC certification of short-necked clam fishery in Ashtamudi Lake was a success because the stakeholders were limited. While aggressive states try to exploit the marine resources to the maximum potential, non-aggressive states are at a disadvantage. People with high horsepower fishing vessels get more catch while small players are made to invest more to sustain their lives."

Amalgam Foods chairman Abraham J Tharakan said 19 exporters in Kochi have decided to follow the MSC principles for sustainable fishing. "Though Kerala succeeded in obtaining MSC certification for short-necked clam fishery in Ashtamudi Lake, the state has been unable to reap the benefits due to a lack of system to ensure water quality," he said.