A SWIRLING OCEAN OF PLASTIC DEBRIS

Role Played by Microplastics In Transferring Pollutants To The Food Web Has Added A Scary Dimension To Marine Pollution

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Kochi: Frets the riff raff floating on contaminated waters to microplastics in the guts of fish, the menace of marine debris is widespread and has now dragged impacting the lives of the local fishermen in Kochi.

"It was never acknowledged as a problem earlier but for the last few years, we have been getting serious complaints from fishermen who say that their catches have been contaminated," said V Kiran, head, fisheries development management department, Central marine fisheries research institute.

A recent meeting had been convened by environmentalists, the fisheries department and the fishermen’s association to discuss the issue. The meeting was attended by more than 200 fishermen including those from Ernakulam, Alappuzha, Dakshin Kollam and Kollam. A total of 3,000 tonnes of plastic waste is collected each year from the backwaters, rivers and estuaries in the state.

The issue include plastic bags, fishing nets, plastic covers, carry bags, PET bottles, containers of oil, cream, oil, paints, sanitary napkins, electric bulbs, CRT TVs, LED TVs, circuit boards, satellite dishes, bicycles, television sets, toys and footwear. Yet another problem is ghost nets, fishing gear and microplastics that have been abandoned or lost due to damage or accidents. Other debris includes trash, clothing and other waste that finds its way to the bottoms of the sea.

"We need to work out long-term solutions for the fishermen who are directly affected by plastic waste," said V. Asokkumar, marine biotechnology officer, World Wildlife Fund, Delhi.

Among 90% of the debris that enters the ocean, 70% comes from plastic waste, which has been increasing. Marine debris also constitutes 40% of the marine ecosystem, said N. K Pillai, former director-general, CMPRI.

"We need to work out long-term solutions for the fishermen who are directly affected by plastic waste," said Asokkumar.

Kochi: Coastal panchayats have often refused to acknowledge the quantum of non-biodegradable waste generated in their areas. "When we take up the waste audit study in the Ernakulam panchayat close to North Paravur municipal area in Ernakulam, the panchayat president told us that they didn’t have any solid waste. But when we did a door to door survey of the households to check out the amount of waste generated, we found a total of 3% of the waste generated non-biodegradable," said Nambudiri.

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