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## Draft policy moots mariculture zones

FE BUREAU

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**STATE-RUN CENTRAL MARINE Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI)** has said that draft national policy on mariculture has mooted mariculture zones by demarcating special areas in the sea for different mariculture activities such as cage farming, bivalve farming, pen culture, seaweed culture, hatcheries and nurseries based on scientific criteria.

The draft policy was formulated by an expert committee formed by the National Fisheries Development Board (NFDB) with CMFRI director A Gopalakrishnan as its chairman. The policy aims to enhance mariculture production in the country and increase income and employment opportunities in a sustainable way, in addition to promoting entrepreneurship in mariculture by facilitating technical and financial inputs.

The national policy on mariculture also touches upon scores of areas such as market support, food safety and health management, ecolabelling and certification, capacity building, legal framework etc.

According to the policy, satellite remote sensing data and GIS will be used to identify potential zones for mariculture on the basis of scientific evaluation of environmental parameters suitable for various types of



farming avoiding conflict other users and protecting livelihoods of local fishing communities. Sea areas identified in this manner will be designated as mariculture technology parks by the respective states.

CMFRI sources said that ecologically sensitive areas like coral reefs, mangroves, seagrass beds, and other coastal areas with strategic interest would not be considered for mariculture zones. In a bid to support fish breeding, culture, packaging and trade, the policy proposes encouragement to set up off-shore technology parks and coastal embankment systems.

Referring to the security of the mariculture enterprises in the open sea waters, the

policy has made provisions for leasing the water bodies and regulating the activities through changes in the law. All mariculture farms in the sea would operate only in an area leased out for the purpose by the respective maritime states. In addition, the state would register and license all farms for a specific period ensuring all protection to the farm assets.

Touching upon the selection of the species for the farming, exotic and genetically modified (GM) species will not be permitted for open sea culture even though the policy allows to farm these species in closed mariculture systems after stringent risk assessment and monitoring.