

Oceanic squid export prospects brighten as Centre clears jigging

The annual squid fishing potential is estimated at 6.3 lakh tonnes

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Oceanic squid, an under exploited resource in the deep waters of the Arabian Sea, may soon get into India's seafood export basket with the authorities granting permission for squid jigging.

"Squid jigging world over has been done by lights and we received permission from the Centre for jigging using lights within specific power. The government should now allow Indian companies to lease adequate squid vessels for the capture of this variety with export potential considering the shortage of vessels", a leading seafood exporter in Kochi told *BusinessLine*.

Internationally, the method of choice for selective capture of oceanic squid is squid-jigging. However, the lack of well equipped vessels is a handicap in India.

A joint study of fishery research institutions headed by the Central

Marine Fisheries Research Institute throws light on the rich resource that oceanic squid is and which remains underexploited in the deep waters of the Arabian Sea.

Out of the total \$7.8 billion seafood exports last fiscal, squid accounted for 5.44 per cent. The major market for Indian squid are Europe and Japan. Over 40 types of coastal squids are being exported.

The CMFRI research team estimated a total biomass of 2.52 million tonnes of oceanic squid in the deep sea, in the range of 280 nautical miles north west of Kochi and 180 nautical miles west of Mangaluru. The annual fishable biomass of the oceanic squid (*Soualaniensis*) is 6.3 lakh tonnes. The three fishing ports along the West Coast - Kochi, Mangaluru and Goa - can be the launch pads for oceanic squid exploitation.

An abundance of this resource was found near Agatti Island, but the depth of the sea there ranged from 1,800 to 2,600 metres. The average squid biomass was estimated as 4.21 tonnes per sq km. Normally, 24 hours of vessel steaming is required from Kochi to reach the oceanic squid ground in the deep sea. The study was part of a World



The under exploited oceanic squid found in the deep waters of the Arabian Sea

Bank-aided joint research project by a consortium comprising the CMFRI, the Fisheries Survey of India, the National Institute of Fisheries Post Harvest Technology, and the Training and Central Institute of Fisheries Technology to develop a new commercial distant-water squid fishing operations from pro-

duction to consumption.

According to CMFRI, purse seining and gill netting with lights on existing fishing boats are the most efficient gear for exploiting oceanic squids. But fishing using lights, it is feared, leads to over-fishing. However, it is considered safe if practised in a scientific manner. Initially, light fishing was permitted along the Indian coast with certain conditions. But later it was banned due to conflicts among fishermen groups.

But fishing boat operators are against leasing foreign trawlers for squid jigging, saying that indigenous fishing boats of 20 metre length are cost effective.

Joseph Xavier Kalappurackal, general secretary of the Kerala Fishing Boat Operators Association, said that one fishing boat can carry generators and lights, while two others could capture squids using pelagic trawling. This was successfully done off the Oman coast where over 3,000 kg were captured in a single drag. "There is a possibility of over-exploitation of our entire fishery resources, if foreign trawlers are allowed entry for squid jigging", he felt.