



Boat owners to move HC for squid-jigging right



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Government will hold talks with CMFRI scientists and all stakeholders to explore the possibility of launching targeted squid fishery

J Mercykutty Amma, Fisheries Minister

At a time when depleting marine wealth, destructive fishing techniques and climate change have spelled doom for fishermen, the detection of purple back flying squid in abundance in the Arabian Sea has sown the seeds of hope in the community.

An estimated 2.5 lakh tonnes of squid worth ₹17.5 lakh crore is available in the fishing ground located in the central Arabian Sea, extending from 280 nautical miles (NM) northwest of Kochi and 180 NM west of Mangaluru. • More on P5

SQUID JIGGING

'We need to buy tech from the Japanese'

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THE annual fishable biomass of flying squid is 6.3 lakh tonnes and if 50,000 tonnes of them can be caught per year, it will bring an additional income of ₹350 crore, say boat owners. It takes more than 24 hours of vessel steaming from Kochi coast to reach the fishing ground.

The task is easier said than done. Kerala University of Fisheries and Ocean Studies former vice-chancellor B Madhusoodana Kurup said the state government should provide training to deep-sea fishers in squid jigging.



Flying squid

"Japanese are the experts in squid jigging and we'll have to buy the technology from them. The vessels will have lights which illuminate water and attract squid. They're caught using lures on fishing lines which are jigged up and down in the water by machines. There's enormous market and the demand is escalating," he said.

Kerala Fishing Boat Operators Association has decided to approach the High Court seeking direction to the state and Centre to allow mechanised boats to take up targeted squid fishery. "China, Taiwan and Oman are exploiting our resources. If the government makes a policy decision to allow squid fishery, then we'll equip our vessels for the

same. The expense to set up a squid fishery unit of three vessels will come to ₹4 crore," said general secretary Joseph Xavier Kalapurackal.

Kerala stood third in the country with 5.85 lakh tonnes of marine food production in 2017.

"The government should allow 10 squid fishery units on a pilot basis to explore the fishing potential," he said.

"It won't be a challenge for the 3,600 trawl and long liner boats operating from Kerala harbours. If the government supports us, it'll help boost our economy. This high value squid fetch ₹700 to ₹800 per kg in the export market and it's in high demand in Japan and the Western world," said Xavier.

A research team, led by Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute principal scientist K Sunil Mohamed had reported high abundance of purple back flying squid around 280 nautical miles off Kerala coast, and recommended exploration of a new targeted oceanic squid fishery.

Munambam Boat Owners' Coordination Committee chairman P P Girish said: "We've to equip our trawlers for squid fishery. The oceanic squid live between 1,000 m to 3,000 m depth and we have to use squid jig or pelagic fishing nets to catch it. The government has banned the use of lights for fishing. If the Union and state governments make changes in the fishing policy, it'll help improve the lives of fishermen," he said.

Fisheries Minister J Mercykutty Amma said the government has already written to the Centre requesting to extend the territorial waters from 12 nautical miles to 200 nautical miles.

"The government will hold talks with the CMFRI scientists and all stakeholders to explore the possibility of launching targeted squid fishery," she told Express.