

UPSTREAM SWIM High Price Of Diesel, Row Over Light Fishing Also Contribute To Steep Fall In Year-On-Year Catch

Fish production heads south, thanks to El Nino effect, strikes

Jaideep Shenoy & Deepthi Sanjiv | TNN

Mangaluru: Fish, a major source of protein and fatty acids, has gotten too pricey for most homes across that state, thanks to a sharp fall in catch during reasons that include climate change, the El Niño effect and the intermittent strikes by fisher folk over the missing boat *Suvarna Tribhujya*. Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI) data shows Karnataka's production for the year 2018-19 (ending May 31) fell to 4,45,213 tonnes from 5,47,704 tonnes in 2017-18, a drop of 18%.

"There has been an overall decline in fish catch across India," said Dr Prathibha Rohit (scientist in charge) Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), CMFRI, Mangaluru Research Centre. "CMFRI issued a forecast last year over the decline of Indian oil sardine (OS), Sardinella longipinna) because of El Niño. The climate cycle has had a staggered effect on the repro-



NOT SO ROSY: Fishing at the Old Port and (right) market in Mangaluru



ductive biology of the fish. OS is the most abundant fish resource in Indian seas and the catch of this variety often reflects total marine fish landing trends in the country. Climate change has retarded growth of fish." In Karnataka, there has been a decline in the catch of mackerel too. Involvement weather at the start of the fishing season last year and strikes by the fishing community over the light fishing row and later in support of missing fisherman on board *Suvarna Tribhujya*, which dis-

appeared off the coast near Malpe, only added to a dip in production.

"We lost many fishing days because of conflict over light fishing and bull trawling," Prathibha said. "Strikes and cyclones also reduced the number of fishing days. There has been a sea change in the type of resource that came in. Low value catch went to making fish meal (used for fertilizer and animal feed)."

H Shivananda Murthy, former dean, College of Fisheries, concurred on the climate front. "El Niño has had a big effect on fish production globally and in India too. Even a one degree Centigrade rise in sea temperature impacts breeding of some fish species," Murthy said.

Unscrupulous fishing, especially light fishing (using LED lights) which has been banned by the state government since it has an adverse impact on breeding, is also a contributing factor to the

sharp fall in catch. Venkatrao Nadagouda, minister for fisheries and animal husbandry said fishing carried out in violation of norms has been the bane of the fisheries sector. He said despite a 61-day ban on mechanised fishing on Karnataka's coast from June 1-July 31, fishermen in large mechanised boats still venture out into the seas disregarding norms. The ban coincides with the breeding period of mackerel and sardine, the two main varieties of fish in this part of the nation.

Effluents discharged by industries have kept coastal species of fish away, Murthy said. Fishing on the seabed during the fishing ban period adds to declining fish numbers as mechanised craft end up scooping fishlings, Murthy said. Nadagouda said overall in fishing points and an increase in number of fishing boats operating from major and minor fishing harbours is adding to production decline.

"More fishermen means more boats," he said, while claiming the department of fisheries will make use of the ban period to verify documents of not just boats, but fishermen too. "This will help us effectively tackle the issue of right-sized diesel subsidy," he said.

Community worth hit Dayananda Suvarna, a leader of the fishing community in Malpe, admitted that the last season was turbulent for the community both on the land and at sea.

"Besides the usual set of issues like low catch, the rise in diesel prices has kept the fishing community on the edge," Suvarna said. "Many have beached their boats be-

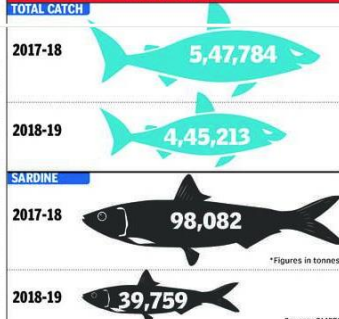
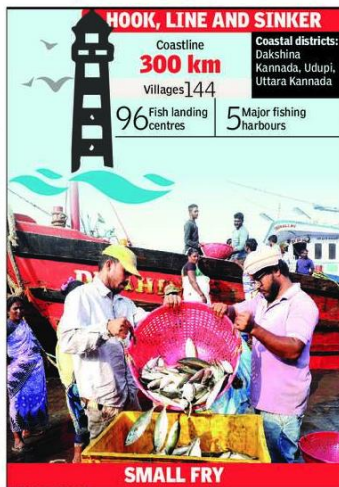
cause they cannot afford escalating costs."

Nithin Kumar, president of Trawl Boat Union, admitted wildly fluctuating prices of diesel is a cause of concern. "While the price of diesel has tapered down, it was astronomically high during the fishing season," Nithin said. He said an all-India forum of fishermen had met Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the issue and had demanded road cess be removed from diesel provided for fishing purposes.

Besides the poor catch of sardine and mackerel has also hit the community hard. Sulochani Kotian (pic below) at Jeppu Market said, "This is the second consecutive year we have recorded a drop in fish catch. But the season that ended in May has been terrible. For deep sea fishing that lasts for 10-12 days, we need diesel worth Rs 4 lakh and returns were poor."

Like Sulochani, there are at least 20 women at Jeppu market who depend on fishing for their livelihood. Sulochani's sons own two boats, but were badly hit because of a shortage of fish. The fisher folk claim that they are selling fish from Chennai. At least 5,500 women sell fish at various markets in Mangaluru. Nalini Salian, one such fisherwoman, demanded that the government extend pension to fisherwomen to protect them from such vagaries.

The poor catch has inevitably impacted end consumers. Nagaraj Pai, proprietor of Machali, a sea food restaurant in Mangaluru, says with the fisherman in place, he will have to source fish from the Chennai and Kochi markets. The poor catch is also pricing fish off dining tables. King fish (anjali) that sold for Rs 300-400/kg when Nagaraj launched his restaurant five years ago, now sells at Rs 650-700/kg. Even the price of sardines has more than doubled and pomfret sells for about Rs 1,000/kg.



**Trigger fish catch up from zero to 35,684 tonnes; Pink perch catch up by 40%; Indian mackerel catch down by 29%.

KFC INCOME SPIRALS DOWN

Year	Fish value	Income
2014-15	34.1	20.5
2015-16	30.2	18.2
2016-17	47.8	28.7
2017-18	33	19.8
2018-19	26.7	16

Source: Karnataka Fisheries Development Corporation | Figures in rupee crore

BIG PICTURE