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Centre to invest ₹25,000 cr in fisheries in 3-5 years

Funds will be used to build infrastructure; inland fish production to be doubled to 6 mt

V SAJEEV KUMAR

Hyderabad, September 3

As part of the ambitious Blue Revolution project, the Union government has lined up ₹25,000 crore to invest in different segments of the fisheries sector in the next three to five years.

"We are looking at three types of support by way of infrastructure development in harbours; extending subsidies to joint venture projects to set up hatcheries/nurseries/quarantine facilities as well as viability gap funding to establish processing plants, and cold chain facilities at harvest or landing sites, said Rajni Sikhri Sibal, Secretary, Department of Fisheries.

The amount will be disbursed through different schemes such as Pradhan Mantri Sampada

Yojana and World Bank schemes. The government has already started a fishery infrastructure development fund with ₹7,300 crore, which is an interest subvention scheme, she said.

As inland fisheries contribute only 50 per cent of the total fish production, the government intends to augment its potential by covering reservoirs, wetlands, rivers and streams in different parts of the country.

"We are planning to promote cold water fisheries in the entire Himalayan region to rear high-value fish varieties. We will soon sign an MoU with Iceland and Denmark to breed trout fish, a high-value variety. We have already signed an MoU with Norway in this regard," she said. Considering the low contribution of inland water fisheries, the government is looking to

double its production to six million tonnes from the current three million tonnes in the next three to four years. To achieve the target, she said, quality seeds and feeds, aquatic animal health laboratories, and quarantine facilities are required.

The Fisheries Secretary was interacting with *BusinessLine* on the sidelines of Aqua Aqaria India 2019 organised by Marine Products Exports Development Authority (MPEDA) in Hyderabad.

Since maintaining the quality of Indian seafood is a major issue, she said the focus would be on ensuring quality, disease control and traceability of marine food products from "farm to fork" or from "catch to consumer." The government will soon come up with a set of protocols for preparation of feed and certifica-

tion of seed, she said, adding that all these efforts would help double Indian seafood exports from over ₹47,000 crore in five years.

The proposed Marine Fisheries Regulation and Management Bill will regulate EEZ of the country and ensure that "our waters are utilised by our own fishermen," the Secretary said in reply to a query on the reported intrusion of foreign fishing trawlers on the Indian EEZ.

On the juvenile fish catch, she said there is a clear definition in the Bill pertaining to the size of fish to be caught. The Bill, which is in the public domain now, will be introduced in Parliament by the end of this year.

There are also proposals to issue unique license numbers and insurance for fishing trawlers and crew by levying a small fee. The money collected would be used for the safety measures of the fishing community, she added.

(The reporter was in Hyderabad at the invitation of MPEDA)

Fishmeal producers call off month-long strike

V SAJEEV KUMAR

Kochi, September 3

Fishmeal producers across the country, who had been on an agitation since August 1, have called off the strike launched against levying 5 per cent goods and services tax (GST) with retrospective effect.

The strike was withdrawn following an assurance from Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman to take up the matter in the next GST Council meeting, said Dawood Sait, secretary, All India Fishmeal and Oil Manufacturers and Merchants Association. He said Rajesh Chudasama, MP from Junagadh in Gujarat, also urged the industry to withdraw the strike considering the sufferings of fishermen and boat owners.

As many as 56 fishmeal industrial units across Kerala, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Gujarat and Tamil Nadu went on strike, demanding GST exemption. The nationwide strike had crippled the sector, affecting the fishing community across the coastlines.

The ₹1,750-crore industry came to a standstill when the government decided to collect GST from fishmeal producers with retrospective effect. Fishmeal is a major ingredient for aquatic feed manufacturing. The domestic production of fishmeal has made revolutionary strides in the development of shrimp farming. It is processed mainly from fish varieties unfit for human consumption.

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