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Indian oil sardine seemingly on revival path along Kerala coast, says CMFRI

FE BUREAU

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INDIAN OIL SARDINE, which was showing a declining trend for the past few years, appears to be on a revival path along the Kerala coast, state-run Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI) said on Friday.

Scattered batches of immature sardines have been reported from the southern coast of the state because of a seemingly favourable condition in the marine ecosystem.

For the last five years, there has been a sharp decline of oil sardine along the Kerala coast. El Niño Southern Oscillation causes a rise in sea-surface temperature and triggers changes in the ocean's vertical, thermal structure, particularly in coastal regions, and the warming of sea water has been



a major reason for the decline in the sardine population.

However, the CMFRI cautioned against extensive catching of these stocks as it may badly affect the expected revival. Upon assessing the sexual maturity, a team of researchers of the CMFRI has found that these sardines having a size of 14-16 cm are yet to reach the reproductive stage.

Flagging concerns over indiscriminate fishing of these small sardines, researchers

pointed out that they require another three more months to attain full maturity. CMFRI's study also revealed that the spawning stock biomass of sardine along Kerala waters is meagre now.

"Considering this unusual and unfavourable status of the stock, we advise not to catch these sardines even though they fall above the minimum legal size of 10 cm", said EM Abdussamad, principal scientist of CMFRI who led the study.

The fish registered a slight increase in 2017, but contin-

ued to fall deep again during the following years. The last year witnessed the lowest catch of sardine in two decades at 44,320 tonne. The CMFRI had earlier found that unfavourable conditions in the ocean ecosystem following the El Niño was behind fluctuations in the availability of the sardine.

According to CMFRI, imposing a self-regulation in fishing these sardines would greatly help augmenting the revival.

Marine fish catch grew 2.1% YoY in 2019, with the country recording 3.56 million tonne in total landings, according to CMFRI data.

Kerala witnessed a significant drop of 15.4% in the marine fish landings last year with total landings of 5.44 lakh tonne. A sharp decline in catch of oil sardine and Indian mackerel, the two major resources in the state, is the highlight of Kerala's landings.