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## Indian oil sardine on revival path

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Indian oil sardine, stock of which was showing a declining trend for the past few years, appears to be on a revival path along the Kerala coast, thanks to a seemingly favourable condition in the marine ecosystem.

Scattered batches of immature sardines have been reported from the southern coast of the State due to this condition, the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute said in a release.

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



Flagging concern over indiscriminate fishing of these small sardines, the CMFRI 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 (MLS) of 10 cm", said Dr E M Abdussamad, Principal

Scientist of CMFRI who led the study. "The CMFRI has brought this to the attention of the Kerala Fisheries Minister, J Mercykutty Amma", said CMFRI Director Dr A Gopalakrishnan.

For the last five years, there has been a sharp decline of oil sardines along the coast in the State. The fish registered a slight increase in 2017, but continued to fall deep again during the following years.

The year 2020 saw the lowest catch of sardine in two decades – 44,320 tonnes.

CMFRI had earlier found that unfavourable conditions in the ocean ecosystem following El Nino was behind the fluctuations in the availability of the sardine.

According to CMFRI, imposing a self-regulation in fishing these sardines would greatly help augment the revival of the oil sardine along Kerala coast.