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Oil sardines on revival path, but scientists advise caution

Immature sardines spotted in southern coastal Kerala

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After showing a declining trend for the past few years, Indian oil sardine seems to be on a revival path along the Kerala coast.

Scattered batches of immature sardines have been spotted in southern coastal Kerala thanks to a seemingly favourable condition in the marine ecosystem.

But the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI) cautioned against catching them extensively, as it might badly impact the expected revival of the fish. Upon assessing sexual maturity, a team of CMFRI researchers found that the sardines with a size of 14 cm to 16 cm were yet to reach the reproductive stage.

Flagging concern over the indiscriminate fishing of small sardines, the researchers pointed out that they would require another three months to attain full maturity. The CMFRI study also revealed that the spawning stock biomass of sardines in the Kerala waters was



Catch with care: Fishermen have been warned that catching oil sardine extensively now may badly impact its population.

meagre. “Considering the unusual and unfavourable status of the stock, we advise not to catch sardines even though they fall above the minimum legal size [MLS] of 10 cm,” said E.M. Abdussamad, principal scientist, CMFRI, who led the study.

“CMFRI has brought the matter to the attention of Fisheries Minister J. Mercykutty Amma,” said CMFRI Director A. Gopalakrishnan.

For the past five years, there has been a sharp decline in oil sardine population along the State’s coast.

It registered a slight increase in 2017 but continued to fall deep again during the following years. Last year witnessed the lowest catch of sardines in two decades at 44,320 tonnes. CMFRI had earlier found that unfavourable conditions in the ocean ecosystem following El Nino were behind the fluctuations in the availability of the fish variety.

According to CMFRI, imposing a self-regulation in fishing sardines will immensely help in augmenting their revival.