

Survey of marine mammals gets under way

Research team to monitor stocks, collect oceanographic parameters

The Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (ICAR-CMFRI), the Marine Products Export Development Authority (MPEDA) and the Fishery Survey of India (FSI) have jointly launched a research cruise for assessment of the marine mammal population of India's exclusive economic zone (EEZ).

“The research initiative assumes significance in the wake of emerging seafood trade-related challenges faced by the fishermen targeting high-value resources and the export market players of India. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), USA, had issued import strictures of strict adherence to norms laid out in the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) of their country, stating that seafood exporting countries should not allow intentional killing of marine mammals in commercial fisheries. For exporting fish and fish products, the U.S. has given a five-year exemption period starting January 1, 2017, to nations for developing regulatory programmes by assessing marine mammal stocks, estimating by-catch, calculating by-catch limits, and reducing total by-catch,” according to a press release issued by the CMFRI.

A joint initiative of the three agencies functioning under different ministries, the cruise is aimed at closely observing and monitoring of marine mammal stocks and scientific interaction, especially collecting oceanographic parameters. “This research will emerge as a game-changer in conservation of marine mammals and reduction in the interaction of ecologically threatened species by ensuring uninterrupted export of the seafood and enhancing the livelihood of the fisheries sector. The mission is expected to lead to the genesis of a pioneering research project conceived and implemented by CMFRI with the financial assistance of the MPEDA and infrastructure support of the FSI,” said CMFRI Director A. Gopalakrishnan.

R. Jeyabaskaran, Principal Investigator of the project, said that it focused on assessing the status of stock health of marine mammals and all species of sea turtles in Indian waters. “Marine mammals and sea turtles play key roles in maintaining marine ecosystems,” he said.