

Research cruise to study marine mammal population

A joint initiative of CMFRI, the Marine Products Export Development Authority (MPEDA) and the Fishery Survey of India (FSI), the cruise is aimed at closely observing and monitoring of marine mammal stocks and scientific interaction, especially collecting oceanographic parameters. 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.

Three major central agencies have jointly launched a research cruise for assessment of the marine mammal population of the exclusive economic zone (EEZ), Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (ICAR-CMFRI) said on Wednesday.

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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 US 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.

“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. 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. “This is a project of national importance with global impact, which once successfully completed would place our research status on marine mammals in the select comity of nations”, he said.

R Jeyabaskaran, principal investigator of the project and senior scientist of CMFRI said: “The project focuses 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”.