

## Scientists begin assessment of marine mammal population

In a major attempt that would pave the way for boosting India's seafood trade, 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 assessing the marine mammal population in the exclusive economic zone on Wednesday.

The cruise mission was flagged off by MPEDA chairman K S Srinivas and others.

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 for 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.

CMFRI director A. Gopalakrishnan said 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 seafood.

"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", said Gopalakrishnan.

R. Jeyabaskaran, 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", said Jeyabaskaran.