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Marine mammal survey begins

Kochi: A joint research cruise for assessing marine mammal population of India's exclusive economic zone (EEZ) was flagged off on Wednesday under the initiative of the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI), the Marine Products Export Development Authority (MPEDA) and the Fishery Survey of India (FSI).

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 US has given a five-year exemption period starting January 1, 2017 to nations for developing regulatory programmes by assessing marine mammal stocks, estimating bycatch, calculating bycatch limits, and reducing total bycatch.

The cruise is aimed at closely observing and monitoring 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 fishermen,” said CMFRI director A Gopalakrishnan.

Principal investigator of the project R Jeyabaskaran 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”.