

# *Oil sardines catch along Kerala coast declined steeply to 28-year low in 2021*

But State's total marine catch increased 54%

## **OUR BUREAU**

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Oil sardines catch nosedived by 75 per cent last year to a meagre 3,297 tonnes along the Kerala coast — the lowest in 28 years — and 98 per cent lower than the annual average sardine availability of 1.66 lakh tonnes during 1995-2020, a study by the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI) said.

The finding was presented at a workshop held at CMFRI with the participation of the representatives of various fishermen organisations. However, Kerala recorded 5.55 lakh tonnes of total marine catch in 2021 registering an increase of 54 per cent compared with Covid-hit 2020 when it was 3.6 lakh tonnes.



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Lesser sardine (65,326 tonnes) topped the list of the most landed resources in the State in 2021, followed by Indian mackerel (56,029 tonne) and scad (53,525 tonne).

## **Small fishers bear the brunt**

Even as availability of oil sardine, silver bellies and black pomfret decreased, penaeid prawns, squid and threadfin breams increased significantly during the year, said T M Na-

jmudeen, Principal Scientist while presenting the findings.

Kerala's marine fisheries sector suffered a severe loss owing to the steep decline in the catch of oil sardine, showed another CMFRI study. The annual value of the sardine in the landing centres dropped to ₹30 crore from that of ₹608 crore in 2014, incurring a loss of ₹578 crore to the sector, said N Aswathy, Principal Scientist of CMFRI.

Small-scale fishermen who venture into the sea on outboard ring-seines bore the brunt of the dwindling catch of the sardine as they primarily depended upon this fish for their livelihood. Even as many other fish resources showed an increase in the landings, the annual income of this group of fishers was reduced to ₹90,262 in 2021 from that of ₹33.5 lakh, she said.

Fisheries experts at the work-

shop also called for strict measures to curb juvenile fishing as it causes severe loss to the marine fisheries sector. They warned that juvenile fishing practice would result in economic loss and resource depletion as well.

Citing CMFRI's study, Najmudeen pointed out that 31 per cent of the threadfin breams (*Kilimeen*) caught from the Kerala coast last year were juveniles. "This alone has incurred a loss of ₹74 crore to the sector", he said, adding that implementation of the Minimum Legal Size (MLS) had a significant impact in the sector.

Charles George, President of Kerala Matsya Thozhilali Aikya Vedi, said fishermen across the State were in deep crisis owing to steep hikes in fuel prices and dwindling catch of commercially important fishes, especially the Indian oil sardine.