

Juvenile fishing continues to be major challenge in Kerala's marine fisheries sector, says CMFRI

KOCHI: Kerala's marine fisheries sector is suffering huge losses due to juvenile fishing practices being continued in the state's coastal waters, according to a new report. A report presented by the Central Marine Fisheries Institute (CMFRI) at a stakeholder workshop held at the Institute here pointed out that 31 per cent of threadfin breams (Kilimeen) caught from the Kerala coast last year were juveniles (below the Minimum Legal Size-MLS). Due to this, the marine fisheries sector incurred a loss of Rs 178 crore. Juvenile fishing of Indian oil sardines led to a loss of Rs 137 crore, said a CMFRI release, quoting the study report.

The workshop, attended by stakeholders including representatives of fishermen, boat owners, and allied workers, was organised to discuss the latest trends and issues in the marine fisheries sector of the state. Presenting the report, CMFRI Principal Scientist Dr T M Najmudeen said that in 2022, juvenile fishing was increasingly reported during the trawling ban period as compared to previous years.

"However, the unscientific practice has been on a declining trend ever since the MLS was implemented in the state", he said. A minimum legal size (MLS) is seen as a fisheries management tool with the ability to protect juvenile fish, maintain spawning stocks, and control the sizes of fish caught. In a case study done on threadfin breams to analyse the impact of MLS implementation on Kerala's marine fisheries sector, the CMFRI found that standing stock biomass, yield, and recruitment numbers of this fish had a substantial increase of 27 per cent, 47 per cent and 64 per cent respectively after the regulation was put in place.

According to CMFRI, when one tonne of juvenile oil sardines was caught, the sector incurred a loss of Rs 4,54,000. Refraining from exploiting the young stocks would not only help fishermen increase their income but also aid in reviving the sector, Dr Najmudeen said.

CMFRI Director Dr A Gopalakrishnan said that self-regulation and conducive climatic conditions might be the reason for the increase in marine fish production, including oil sardines, in Kerala last year. Referring to the uniform implementation of MLS regulations, he said that CMFRI had suggested this regulation to all coastal states. However, only Kerala and Karnataka stepped in to implement it. Stakeholders who participated in the workshop demanded that MLS regulations be implemented across the country. They said that a special package should be provided to compensate for the loss while abstaining from juvenile fishing. They also suggested that the entry of fishing boats from other states to the Kerala coast be restricted and that licences should not be issued to new boats.