

# Juvenile Fishing Continues to Incur Loss to Kerala's Marine fisheries: CMFRI



**KOCHI:** Juvenile fishing practice continues to be a major challenge in Kerala's marine fisheries sector, according to the ICAR-Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI). A CMFRI report presented at a stakeholder

workshop held at the institute pointed out that 31 percent of the threadfin breams (Kilimeen) caught from the Kerala coast last year were juveniles (below the size of the Minimum Legal Size-MLS). "This has incurred Rs. 178 cr to the sector, while juvenile fishing of Indian oil sardine caused a loss of Rs. 137 cr", the report said. 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 against the previous years. "However, the unscientific practice is on a declining trend ever since the MLS was implemented in the state", he said.

In a case study done in threadfin breams to analyse the impact of the MLS implementation on Kerala's marine fisheries, the CMFRI found that standing stock biomass, yield and recruitment numbers of this fish had a substantial increase of 27%, 47% and 64% respectively after the regulation was put in place. A significant percentage of sharks (82%), which are not covered by the MLS regulations, caught off the Kerala coast last year were below their size at first maturity.

According to CMFRI, the sector incurs a loss of Rs. 4,54,000 when fishing one tonne of juvenile oil sardines. Refraining from exploiting the young stocks would not only help fishermen increase their income but also aid in reviving the fishery, Dr Najmudeen said. Dr EM Abdussamad stressed the need for including more fishes under the MLS regulation and revising the existing MLS of certain fish species. Studies and discussions are underway in this regard, he added.

CMFRI Director Dr A Gopalakrishnan said that self-regulation and conducive climatic conditions might be the reason behind the increase in marine fish production including oil sardine in Kerala last year. Referring to the uniform implementation of the MLS regulations, he said that CMFRI had suggested this regulation to all the coastal states, but only Kerala and Karnataka stepped in to implementation. The resources such as purple-back flying oceanic squid, mesopelagic fishes and non-conventional ribbon fish species (*Trichiurus auriga*) commonly seen in southern coast, which are hitherto unexploited, have immense potential for fishing, he added.

Stakeholders demanded that the MLS regulations be implemented across the country. A special package should be provided to compensate for the loss while abstaining from juvenile fishing. They also wanted to restrict the entry of fishing boats from other states to the Kerala coast and stop the issuance of licenses to new boats. Dr EM Abdussamad, Dr P Laxmilatha, Dr C Ramachandran and Dr N Aswathy, Dr M B Baiju, NK Santhosh, Joseph Xavier Kalappurakkal, Charles George, Mohanan PT, Anandan KV, Sangheetha N R, Sandeep P, Sethu G, M Majeed, Unnikrishnan AD, Mani Nayarambalam, Soman KC and Tomi KC participated in the discussion.