

# Marine mammal conservation crucial for India's seafood export, say experts at Agricultural Science Congress

Kochi: Conservation of marine mammals is crucial for India's seafood export as the country must comply with the US Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA), which prohibits the intentional killing of marine mammals in commercial fisheries, experts said here on Friday.

Speaking at a workshop held at the 16th Agricultural Science Congress (ASC), P Anil Kumar, Joint Director of Marine Products Export Development Authority, Kochi MPEDA said the US is a major importer of Indian seafood, accounting for 33 per cent of the country's total exports in terms of value. "If India fails to comply with the MMPA, its seafood exports to the US could be affected, impacting the livelihood of fishing communities," he said.

Dr A Gopalakrishnan, Director of the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI), said the research on marine mammals in India is based on stranding data, offshore surveys, onshore surveys, and bycatch estimates. Dr. Vivekanandan, another expert, noted that research on marine mammals is a complex and challenging task, requiring the collective support of biologists, veterinarians, environmentalists, and conservationists. He added that the major focus of research on marine mammals in India is to estimate the status of the stocks, understand the correlation between environmental variables and abundance, assess the impacts of climate change, and develop conservation measures.

The workshop highlighted the importance of marine mammal conservation for India's seafood export and the challenges and opportunities in conducting research on these species. The participants stressed on the need for a collaborative approach to marine mammal conservation, involving all stakeholders, including government agencies, research institutions, fishermen communities, and NGOs. Dr Sijo Varghese, Zonal Director of Fishery Survey of India, Dr J Jayasankar, Dr Prajit KK, Dr Grinson George, Dr K R Sreenath and Dr R Ratheeshkumar spoke on the occasion, a statement added.