

India: CMFRI proposes central legislation for regulation of fishing beyond territorial waters



Kochi: Seeking to harness the potential of India's marine wealth, the ICAR-Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI) has proposed a set of comprehensive policy suggestions, including the introduction of central legislation (Marine Fishery Act). According to CMFRI, the proposed Act is necessary for the regulation of fishing in areas beyond territorial waters to address policy and legislative vacuum, providing a much needed frame-work for sustainable practices.

The proposals were presented by CMFRI Director Dr A Gopalakrishnan during the discussion on certification and sustainability in the marine sector at the high-level national workshop organised by the NITI Aayog at CMFRI on Friday.

Institutionalisation of Regular Stock Assessments Key in WTO Subsidy Negotiations

Institutionalisation of regular stock assessments of marine fishery resources was another major recommendation. "The government has to institutionalise a regular mechanism for the stock assessment of these resources, as resource health status is going to be crucial in WTO subsidy negotiations and other national and international discourse", Dr Gopalakrishnan said.

Eco-labeling

Referring to the recent debate on certification of Indian marine fisheries, CMFRI suggested a national guideline on the eco-labeling of marine fishery resources. "Private investments must be made competitive and subject to regulations to safeguard the livelihoods of small-scale fishers and entrepreneurs in the post-harvest sector", CMFRI Director said.

The proposals also included streamlining of open sea mariculture, emphasising the need for sustainability and equity to receive adequate focus in determining different ownership and operatorship formats for scaling-up mariculture activities.

Implementation of AI-mediated automated mechanisms for landing estimation, tracking of fishing vessels through Vessel Monitoring Systems (VMS), and analytics of sub-stock-level information also found a place in the proposal. Focused research and exploration projects are required to assess and characterise deep-sea and non-conventional fishery resources, Dr Gopalakrishnan added.

Establishing an institutional mechanism for overseeing deep-sea fishing was also recommended, with a clear emphasis on economic viability and adherence to national and state-specific policy guidelines. He also underscored the importance of estimating the potential and exploring the possibility of utilising mesopelagic resources as source for fish meal, citing a rough potential of 1.6 million tonnes of these resources per year.

"Greater attention needs to be given to island ecosystems and planned expansion of the fishery and value chain development, along with management of the live bait fishery of Lakshadweep", Dr Gopalakrishnan said.

Insurance

To protect the interest of fishers, strengthening of accident insurance, fishing vessel insurance, and coastal immovable asset insurance is required through technological and policy interventions, he said, adding that the ongoing artificial reef installation programmes in coastal waters should be intensified with mechanisms for continuous impact assessment monitoring and improvisation.

Dr J K Jena, Deputy Director General of Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) who moderated the discussion, said India needs to achieve sustainable production from coastal waters and enhanced production from offshore waters. "One of the approaches to intensify capture fish production is the exploitation of oceanic and deep-sea resources, which are yet to be tapped fully", he added. The proposals were presented in the presence of NITI Aayog member Prof. Ramesh Chand and a diverse array of key stakeholders, including policymakers from the Central and state governments, leading industry experts and researchers.