

## **Fisheries: “Need national guideline on eco-labeling of marine fishery resources”**



New Delhi. 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.

### **government will have to make stock assessment of these resources a regular mechanism**

Institutionalization of Regular Stock Assessments Key in WTO Subsidy Negotiations Institutionalization of regular stock assessments of marine fishery resources was another major recommendation. “The government has to institutionalist 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.

### **Emphasis on the need for stability and equity**

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

### **Need for focused research and exploration projects for fishery resources**

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 characterize deep-sea and non-conventional fishery resources, Dr Gopalakrishnan added.

### **Discussion on assessing sources of fish food and exploring possibilities**

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 utilizing mesopelagic resources as source for fish meal, citing a rough potential of 1.6 million tons of these resources per year.

### **Management of fisheries in Lakshadweep needs attention**

“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.

### **India needs sustainable production from coastal waters**

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.

### **leading industry experts and researchers**

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.