Conclusions

The market structure existing at Perumbavoor and Muvattupuzha markets like infrastructure amenities, parking facilities, number of stalls operating in the market, takings of the market, number of vendors, trucks entering and exiting with load etc. Perumbavoor market can be graded as a ‘C grade market’ and Muvattupuzha market as an ‘A grade market’.

Mostly trucks carrying fishes from the night fish markets at Perumbavoor and Muvattupuzha transports it to hilly areas like Idukki. As it is early morning these trucks carrying fishes from night fish markets can pass through, without any traffic or any other obstacles in their way, thus reaching the destination within a short time span, thereby supplying fresh fish at the end points. Thus quality fishes are available in high ranges like Idukki, even though it is considered as a land locked area. The traditional understanding of low marine fish demand for hilly regions and landlocked area were found to be a mismatch considering the amount of fish inflow to those areas and the quality of fish available for consumption. An important observation was the existence of dedicated roads catering to the improved time utility in fish consumption as the fish is getting transported during early morning hours. The market capitalization is around 200-300 tonnes per day amounting to an average turnover of ₹ 500-600 crores.

Non-operational trawlers and ban on Hilsa export by Bangladesh adversely impacts the fish availability in West Bengal

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Fish availability in the domestic markets of West Bengal had adverse impacts owing to the recent ban on import of Hilsa from Bangladesh. Due to incessant rise in prices of Hilsa, catfish, major and minor carps in the recent past, fish loving Bengalis relied on marine fishes such as mackerel, sciaenids, seabass, Bombay-duck and flatfishes for their consumption. The marine fishes were less preferred by Bengali fish eating population earlier because of their colour and smell. However, during recent months, steep hike in the prices of marine fishes are observed. The spurt in the prices has been mostly due to the alarming decline in the supply of the fish in markets. National Marine Fishery Data Centre reports from Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute indicate that the Hilsa catch in West Bengal witnessed a heavy decline from 83,000 tonnes in 2010 to 20,000 tonnes in 2011. In 2012 also, the commercial landings of the fish has been dropped further and reached 9,200 tonnes. Since January 2012, the monthly estimated landings of Hilsa have been on decline in almost all the months as compared to same periods of the previous year except in August and September (Fig. 1).

The marine fish landings in West Bengal have shown 3.6 fold increase from 0.97 lakh tons during 2001 to 3.65 lakh tons during 2011 (Fig. 2). The contribution of West Bengal to India’s marine fish
landings was around 4.3% in 2001, which has been increased to 11.2% in 2009. The increase in number and size of fishing crafts fitted with high powered engines and efficient gears, introduction of multiday fishing and extension of fishing grounds have been the important factors which augmented fish landings.

This fish has played a key role in the economy of Bangladesh. Large quantum of Bangladeshi fishermen is depending on Hilsa for their livelihood. Bangladesh because of its recent ban on Hilsa export might lose out on export of this fish to India. Myanmar emerging as a potential Hilsa resource partner for India will also dampen the prospects of Bangladesh as a prominent exporter to India in the long run.

Bangladesh Fisheries Research Institute (BFRI) is coming up with prospective conservation plans on jatka - the juveniles of Hilsa to improve the stock of the fish. Hilsa is a migratory fish and it continues to change its course very often. A probable resolution that may help in improving the Hilsa stock in this region is to establish a transnational research agency, which should work towards a tri-nation agreement between Bangladesh, India and Myanmar to conserve this fish which migrates extensively. West Bengal government provide alternative employment and rice at ₹ 2 per kg for 2,00,000 fishermen in West Bengal if they abstain from catching Hilsa during the breeding/ migrating months of April- May, October - November as a conservation measure. Climate change may also be attributed to the decline in catch in West Bengal region as there is decline in rainfall status in Southern Bengal during the last few years. Adding to the woes in the region, there is severe choking of various creeks in Sunderbans delta due to emergence of islands. Heavy siltation is forcing the fish to take up a new migratory course. Apart from the low catch in West Bengal, even the yields in riverine tracts have been low. Madhvi Sally and Sutanuka Ghoshal in their report on soaring Hilsa prices in early August 2012 in Economic Times clearly point out the decline in the availability of Hilsa in the estuaries of Hoogly. Besides these, industrial effluents flushed into Ganges from many places along the riverine course destroy the quality of water. Eventually, the fisheries of Hilsa has declined due to recruitment failure and intensified exploitation of adults and juveniles. Hence, the declining trend of landings of Hilsa and reduced operations of trawlers calls for conservation and recovery of the fishery in West Bengal.