

FOUR FISHING AREAS IN THE PIPER

Southern States Demand A Separate Ministry At The Centre For Fisheries

Sudha.Nambudiri @timesgroup.com

Kochi: The newly released Kerala Marine Fishing Regulation Rules 2018 is serving as a temporary baseline document for other coastal states to amend their respective Marine Fishing Regulation Act (MFRA) and rules in the management of the fishing sector.

All the South Indian fisheries ministers' conference that concluded here on Sunday, officials from six states and three Union territories made the initial move to put a unified front for evolving common rules for the peninsular states in this sector, which could then be taken further to other coastal states.

Kerala is the only state in the country to have amended the MFRA Act 1980 (on September 18, 2017) and one year later, formulated the rules (on September 1). At a meeting held in Delhi last month, the central government officials and state representatives discussed their appreciation and most of them are now drafting their respective Act and rules based on Kerala's guidelines.

Unanimously they sought to pressurize the need for a separate fisheries ministry at the Centre.

As of now, the fisheries sector comes under ministerial of agriculture, commerce, shipping and external affairs. "We have been discussing this issue and we will raise it in the Parliament also," said state fisheries minister J. Mercykutty Amma. Mallikarjuna Reddy, minister for fisheries, Puducherry, said since there was no dedicated ministry for fisheries, the sector was not being considered with sensitivity and proper importance. "If there's an issue with farmers, the entire Central machinery steps in to help them. The fisheries sector is also of equal importance against the backdrop of growing food security issues."

Fisheries ministers from Kerala, Maharashtra and Pondicherry attended the meet besides officials from all the southern states and Union territories of Lakshadweep and Andamans. They raised the issues of fishermen and other states coming and fishing in their areas.

Fisheries development commissioner Paul Pandian said the Centre would consider states' demand for extending the fishing areas from 12 nautical miles — which is the territorial waters — to 36 nautical miles as most fishing boats have high-speed engines. "We are coming up with new guidelines for the National Policy for Fisheries for the National Policy (NPF)", He said it would include an advisory of engine horsepower in accordance with the length of the fishing vessel.

The conference of fisheries ministers from south Indian states has possibly decided to implement in all the states the minimum legal size recommended by the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI) to curb juvenile fishing, said Mercykutty Amma. "Kerala has already implemented the M.L.S for 50 fish species to ban juvenile fishing. Now, other states have also come forward to implement the measure in their territorial waters to make the regulation more effective," she added.

The meeting also urged the Union government to reduce the fuel price and to waive road tax for fuel for fishing vessels. Fisheries officials of the south Indian states arrived at a consensus demanding the Centre to give the authority to the states to provide fishing rights beyond the territorial waters of 12 nautical miles. The conference also decided to put pressure on the Union government to implement the unit cost of deep sea fishing vessels from the existing Rs 10 lakh to Rs 1.5 crore.

What The South Indian States Demand



- Regulation on fishing gear manufacturers
- Minimum legal size to curb juvenile fishing
- Regulation of fishing vessel construction
- Curbs on illegal entry of fishing vessels into territorial water of other countries
- A ban on destructive fishing practices
- Prevention of IUU fishing
- Optimising fishing effort
- Aquarian reforms
- Separate fisheries ministry at Centre
- Stopping ghost fishing and plastic pollution
- National policy on marine fisheries (NPMF)
- Climate change
- Restriction of mesh size
- Eco-labelling and certification to boost exports
- The Centre should introduce financial safety plans to compensate for employment loss to the fishermen during the trawling ban
- Follow the Central Institute of Fisheries Technology (CIFT) recommendations for the fishing boat design and horsepower of the engine
- Impose mandatory registration for boatyards and net manufactories
- Follow Kerala model 'Clean Sea' initiative to remove plastics from the sea
- Implement a satellite-supported vessel monitoring system (VMS) on fishing vessels venturing into beyond the 12 nautical miles in the sea
- Request the Centre to issue a guideline after reviewing the scientific studies on trawling ban for all the states
- Jointly demand a separate fisheries ministry at the Centre
- Implement hatchery accreditation facility to ensure the quality of fish seeds
- Seek the Centre's technical and financial support for equipping fishermen for deep sea fishing through cooperative societies
- Follow the Kerala model to implement participatory fisheries management councils

STATE SEEKS A BETTER DEAL FROM CENTRE

Sudha.Nambudiri@timesgroup.com

Kochi: There is no point in putting all kinds of restrictions on Kerala fishermen when vessels from other states come and take away all the catch, said fishing community leaders from Kerala who participated in the stakeholders' meet at South Indian fisheries ministers' conference in Kochi on Sunday. "We have not been catching juveniles but boats come as near as Punalani and return with the catch. Unless a consensus is evolved among all states and they also resolve not to take any juveniles, there is no logic in restricting us," said Joseph Xavier Kalapurackal, general secretary of All Kerala Fishing Boat Owners' Association.

They feel that the Centre has not been fair to Kerala. "We need to develop a strong lobby to bring more funding support to the fisheries sector. Neighbouring Tamil Nadu has been given a Rs 2,000 crore package for modernization of their deep-sea vessels, while we have not received any financial assistance," said Charles George, president, Kerala Matsyozhozhil Union. Former Kochi Mayor and president of the Chinese fishing net owners' association K J Sohan said 100 satellites are owned by Isro; not even one could help trace the missing fishermen during Okhli. "It was left to the local fishermen to locate and retrieve boats and go in search of their colleagues," he said.

Kerala Swathantra Matsyozhozhil Union president P P Johns said that this meeting should have taken place in an inland most locations of the proposal to create a corridor at 15 nautical miles off the territorial for a 34.5-km wide shipping channel. Raising concern that the inland fisheries sector has been discussed in the meeting, K K Rameshan, president, Inland Fishworkers' Union, said it was ironic that aquaculture, which was a fast-growing sector, has not been given the much-needed attention. The leasing policy and the need to save the indigenous species should also be considered.

SOUTH INDIAN FISHERIES MINISTERS' CONFERENCE

The meeting also urged the Union government to reduce the fuel price and waive road tax for fuel for fishing vessels

Fish Production And Consumption In The State (2017)

	Domestic requirement	Total fish production	Marine production	Inland production	Export (high-value fish)	Inflow (low-value fish)
	750L MT	778L MT	4.89L MT	1.89L MT	1.79L MT	2.51L MT

All vessels in state to be fitted with auto tracking system

Sudha.Nambudiri@timesgroup.com

Kochi: Monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS) of fishing vessels has got a boost after Cyclone Ockhi with Automatic Identification System (AIS) becoming mandatory for all boats. "Every time a crisis strikes, and the boats go missing, the fishing community turns and blames the government saying that we have no idea of how many boats and people have gone and where. Of course, we didn't know because we haven't kept any data on the movement of these vessels and crew at sea. So, we have decided to make it mandatory for all fishing vessels to have these tracking devices. This will ensure that every time a boat

leaves the shore, it will remain in our radar within our territorial waters," said fisheries minister J. Mercykutty Amma.

AIS is a mandatory international tracking/monitoring/navigation safety communication system under the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) convention. As of now, Maharashtra is the only state in the country to have fitted all its vessels with AIS and it is visible on global sites that track the presence of boats, ships and vessels in waters. This is now being fitted by the state fisheries department in all vessels. Catch certification, vessel monitoring

system, keeping of a log entry, reporting of catches from the sea and random verification will be done at the harbour.

"As of now, we have fitted it in 3,000 fishing boats. This will work in many ways," said Venkatesathulasi S, fisheries director.

He said that the state government was working with Isro to customize the Navig app to enable a two-way communication. "As of now, Navig will work as a receiving device only. It will ensure that the fishermen get the



message from any agency that is reaching out. But we have asked for the fitting of a transponder which will be able to send out a message from the fishing vessel. We asked if Isro team could incorporate a couple of buttons, which could give out messages of SOS, I am safe, etc. so that when the message goes, it will also give out location information in case any search parties are on the lookout."

Presently, the central government has an online uniform registration and licensing system (REAL-Craft) to register all fishing vessels operating in the marine sector. But the aim is to bring in the state departments along with the coastal marine police and the coast guard into the picture.