

India launches pilot study to tap deep-sea fish wealth in EEZ

India has launched a collaborative pilot study within its exclusive economic zone (EEZ) to harness untapped deep-sea resources. The Central Marine Fisheries Research and Central Institute of Fisheries Technology will carry out the joint research with the financial support of the National Fisheries Development Board under the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana.

The pilot project involves fishermen and commercial trawlers, and its goal is to estimate the untapped potential of mesopelagic resources. The research's outcome will determine the feasibility of large-scale exploitation of these resources. Mesopelagic resources (spanning depths of 200-1,000 meters), including myctophids are among the world's most abundant yet largely unexploited fish resources. This research assumes greater significance after their significant industrial applications for fishmeal, nutraceuticals and bioactive compounds. "With global concerns over overfishing of commercially important species used for fishmeal production, this initiative focuses on exploring alternative and sustainable sources, reducing the dependency on traditional fish stocks", said Grinson George, Director of CMFRI.

The scientists working on the project believe that harnessing mesopelagic species can ease pressure on coastal and pelagic fisheries, ensuring a more balanced approach to marine resource management. The collaborative research involves estimating harvestable potential, developing sustainable harvesting methods, exploring value-added applications and assessing the feasibility of commercial exploitation while ensuring ecological sustainability. A rough estimate suggests that around 2 million tonnes of mesopelagic resources are available in Indian waters, Grinson George said. Collaborative efforts with the CIFT will ensure the development of efficient harvesting technologies and post-harvest processing methods, he said

George Ninan, Director of CIFT, emphasised the significant industrial value of these resources, saying that they form the backbone of industries in many countries, including Oman. He added that completing this one-year pilot study will yield crucial insights to determine the best viable methods to utilise these resources. CMFRI's Principal Scientist, Sujitha Thomas, is the principal investigator, and CIFT's Ramesan MP is the project's lead investigator.