

Experts seek special consideration for small-scale fishermen

A panel of experts has called for differential treatment of developing nations on the World Trade Organisation's Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies, emphasising the need to protect the livelihoods of millions of small-scale fishermen while India negotiates on the platform. Fishery scientists, economists, and experts on trade, investment, and law attended the meeting organised by the Bay of Bengal Programme - Inter-Governmental Organisation (BOBP-IGO) in association with ICAR-Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI), Marine Products Export Development Authority (MPEDA), and other organisations here on Tuesday.

Citing the disparity in the economic growth of the sector in developed and developing nations, CMFRI Director Grinson George said historically, subsidies enabled developed countries to build large industrial fleets, causing significant environmental impacts and inequalities in resource distribution. Compared to this, India's fish catch is predominantly small-scale based, making it a matter of food security and livelihood.

James J. Nedumpara at the Centre for Trade and Investment Law of the Indian Institute for Foreign Trade flagged concerns over some aspects of the WTO agreement, saying that strong scientific backing was required to identify overfishing, overfished stocks, and illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing as mentioned in the agreement. He also said that regional fisheries management organisations such as BOBP could play a crucial role in capacity building and sustainability assessment, fostering collaboration of countries at the regional level.

The experts also observed that India's subsidies were minimal compared to major fishing nations like China. Scientists discussed the need for assessing subsidies on a per capita basis instead of an annual aggregate level. MPEDA Director M. Karthikeyan attended the panel discussion. BOBP-IGO Director P. Krishnan moderated the discussion.