

‘WTO subsidy talks must focus on protecting small-scale fishers’

NEED OF THE HOUR. Experts call for differential treatment of developing nations

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Kochi

Negotiations on the World Trade Organisation's agreement on fisheries subsidies should focus on protecting small-scale and artisanal fishers while encouraging sustainable growth in the sector, said experts at a panel discussion. They also called for differential treatment of developing nations under the agreement.

Scientists, economists, 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, Marine Product Export Development Authority and other organisations.

Citing the disparity in the economic growth of the sector in developed and developing nations, CMFRI Director



VOICING CONCERNS. CMFRI Director Grinson George speaking at a panel discussion on the WTO agreement on fisheries subsidies in Kochi

ector, Grinson George, said: “Historically, these 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.

BOBP-IGO Director P Krishnanhighlighted the role

of the Organisation in sensitising and building capacity among the stakeholders in the region.

WORK AHEAD

A representative of the Food and Agriculture Organisation expressed optimism about the WTO agreement, saying it could promote sustainability in the sector by curbing illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing and over-exploitation.

Pinar Karkaya, Economist at FAO Liaison Office in Geneva also explained the legal and practical implications of the agreement.

James J Nedumpara of the Centre for Trade and Investment Law, Indian Institute for Foreign Trade flagged concerns over some aspects of the WTO agreement, saying that strong scientific backing is required to identify overfishing, over-fished stocks and 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 are minimal compared to major fishing nations such as China. Subsidies should be assessed on a per capita basis instead of an annual aggregate level, they said.