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Govt. takes up pilot study on feasibility of commercially exploiting deep-sea resources, says CMFRI director



Director of Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI) Grinson George said on Saturday that the government has initiated a pilot study on the feasibility of commercially exploiting deep-sea resources.

The study is funded by the National Fisheries Development Board (NFDB) under the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY) and done jointly by CMFRI, under the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), and the Central Institute of Fisheries Technology (CIFT) with other stakeholders, he said.

Mr. George was speaking at a regional workshop on ‘developments in deep sea resource exploration and conservation of endangered, threatened, protected species’ organised by CMFRI in association with the Fisheries Department of Karnataka. He said that the country possesses a vast and largely untapped potential in deep-sea fish resources. “Unfortunately, a significant portion of these valuable marine assets remain unutilised. If left unharvested by India, these trans-boundary resources are likely to be exploited by other nations, leading to a substantial economic loss and foregone opportunities in the marine fisheries sector. Beyond India’s territorial waters and at depths greater than 200 metres lie these unexploited, yet sustainably fishable, resources,” the director said.

He said that currently, fishing pressure focuses on up to 100 m depth and about 90% of catch is from up to 50 m. Technological lag and financial constraints prevented fishers from venturing into the deep sea. “CMFRI has identified estimated potential of deep-sea resources such as oceanic squid (estimated potential 0.63 million tonnes), oceanic tuna (estimated potential 0.213 million tonnes), tuna-like fish (estimated potential 33,000 tonnes), mesopelagic fish (1.7 million tonnes), and ribbon fish (0.3 million tonnes),” Mr. George said.

The director said that the mesopelagic resources also hold promise for the fish meal industry, which has a significant protein requirement. A major portion of this demand could be met by mesopelagic resources, which are rich in wax esters and thus not directly edible for human consumption. “To effectively harvest these resources, a crucial need exists to strengthen India’s existing fishing fleet. We require modern vessels equipped with state-of-the-art facilities to not only fish but also handle these resources sustainably,” he said.

Currently, the director said, India lacks a sufficient number of advanced fishing vessels to explore these depths adequately. Therefore, the construction of modernised vessels is essential. The Union government is actively supporting this endeavour through the PMMSY scheme, which offers subsidies for building such advanced vessels. Scientists from CMFRI and CIFT spoke at the workshop which was aimed at fostering collaboration and develop a roadmap for sustainable deep-sea fisheries while ensuring the conservation of vulnerable marine species.