

Experts call for action to tackle illegal shark fishing

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Kochi: Marine experts have called for coordinated action and increased awareness to tackle illegal shark fishing and trade. An interactive workshop and panel discussion organized by Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI) on Monday highlighted the importance of collaboration among various agencies to ensure conservation of protected species in the wake of India's recent expansion of the list of sharks and rays protected under the Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972.

Experts who attended the meeting felt the need to identify gaps in monitoring and enforcement. Habitat mapping,

public awareness campaigns, gear modification, demarcation of conserved areas, AI-supported shark recognition devices and an identification manual were proposed in the workshop. Shark fins in frozen form may often be difficult to identify by enforcement agencies, requiring the need for a strengthened collective capacity among all agencies involved in fisheries management, trade regulation, biodiversity conservation and enforcement.

Inaugurating the workshop, CGST & customs chief commissioner Shaik Khader Rahman said joint training exercises and a real-time communication channel among customs, fisheries officials, coastal police, researchers,

and forest and wildlife departments are essential to enhance enforcement.

"Fishing pressure and unregulated trade, together with other natural and anthropogenic factors like pollution and climate change, have placed many shark species under threat of extinction," said CMFRI director Grinson George. "Over 40 elasmobranch species are now listed under CITES I (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora). This means that any trade involving these species must be accompanied by permits ensuring that their extraction from the wild is sustainable and not detrimental to their survival," he said.