

Budget 2025-26: Govt boosts fisheries sector with focus on Islands

Aimed at strengthening the fisheries sector and unlocking its untapped potential, the Finance Minister, Nirmala Sitaraman, has announced plans to strengthen the sector with a special focus on the Andaman & Nicobar and Lakshadweep Islands. Grinson George, Director of the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI), said efforts to create an enabling framework for harvesting marine resources in the EEZ and high seas are expected to boost India's blue economy, giving a fillip to sustainable utilisation of off-shore fisheries potential. India's EEZ offers a significant opportunity for increased sustainable fishing. While current fishing activity primarily concentrates within the 12-nautical-mile territorial waters, vast underutilised resources exist beyond this limit. "Our fishing is small-scale or subsistent based. The estimated harvestable potential in the EEZ is 7.1 million tonnes. But, we are presently harvesting close to 4 million tonnes, which indicates substantial scope for expansion into deep sea. There is a possibility of utilising another 2 million tonnes of resources from the deep sea," he said.

Deep-sea fisheries, spanning depths of 200-2000 meters, have significant potential for commercial exploitation. Mesopelagic resources (200-1000 meters), including myctophids, are among the world's most abundant yet largely unexploited fish resources. These mesopelagic fishes, rich in fatty acids and lipids, present significant potential for industrial, pharmaceutical, and nutraceutical applications. While some deep sea mesopelagic species contain high levels of wax esters, rendering them unsuitable for direct human consumption, their protein content can be effectively utilised for fish meal production.

T Pradeep Kumar, Vice Chancellor of Kerala University of Fisheries and Ocean Studies, said the budgetary announcement will catalyse the fisheries development, especially when the Government intends to increase the export revenue to Rs One lakh crore. Although highly resourceful, the Andaman and Lakshadweep islands remained underutilised for a long time. The scientific steps to encourage fisheries' resource utilisation can change the economic and social scenario of the sea-going communities of India.

Depleting ocean catch has been a source of worry for fishermen and seafood exporters. Measures to enhance ocean catch and sustain marine flora and fauna are the need of the hour, says K.N. Raghavan, secretary general of the Seafood Exporters Association of India.

Nithin Awasthi of InCred Equities said the efforts to streamline shrimp exports and reduce customs duties on essential inputs (hatchery products, feed, and export materials) would significantly lower production costs and improve industry profitability. Financial support through NABARD and the Fisheries and Aquaculture Infrastructure Development Fund (FIDF) will accelerate shrimp farming and export infrastructure, including Nucleus Breeding Centres for brood-stock development. Policy initiatives, including duty cuts on key inputs (fish hydrolysate, frozen fish paste), and targeted financing (Rs1,528 crore interest subvention by FY26) aim to strengthen India's position as a leading seafood exporter, he added. Analysts at Samco Securities said the Government reaffirmed the continuation of Kisan Credit Cards, which provides short-term loans to 7.7 crore farmers, fishermen, and dairy farmers. Key beneficiaries of these initiatives include Godrej Agrovet, Apex Frozen Foods, and Avanti Feeds.