



KERALA'S OIL SARDINE CATCH BOUNCES BACK

Steady rise disproves concerns of migration of the species

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THOUGH Kerala recorded a marginal 4% decline in marine fish landings in 2024, the state's oil sardine catch showed a steady increase for the third consecutive year. As per the annual fish landing data released by the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI), the state recorded total fish landing of 6.10 lakh tonnes in 2024, compared with 6.33 lakh tonnes in 2023.

However, oil sardine catch, which dropped to 3,297 tonnes in 2021, has been recording a steady increase over the past three years, disproving concerns that the species, a staple in the state, is migrating from the coast. In 2022, the oil sardine catch stood at 1,10,270 tonnes, which rose to 1,38,980 tonnes in 2023.

Indian oil sardine topped the list of most caught species in the state with 1.49 lakh tonnes in 2024, registering a slight increase of 7.6%.

Though the stocks of oil sardine seem to be increasing gradually, the unusual behaviour of the species has surprised scientists. In the first six months of 2024, the species almost disappeared from the coast raising concerns among fishermen. From January to March the catch of oil sardine was only 12,000 tonnes and the landing from April to June was 3,525 tonnes.

"There was a steady decline in oil sardine landing during the first half of 2024 and the price in

local market skyrocketed to ₹450 per kg. However, around 80% of the oil sardine catch, close to 1 lakh tonnes, came from October to December. This was due to an unusual multiple spawning and recruitment. Usually, the spawning happens during the monsoon season. It may be the land runoff triggered by extended rainfall and favourable ocean currents that have acted as the stimulus. But as the landing increased, the price of the species nosedived to ₹20 to ₹30 per kg," said principal scientist P Jayashankar.

CMFRI director Grinson George said, "The decline in oil sardine catch during the first half of 2024 could be due to the impact of marine heat wave and the adverse impact of Indian Ocean Dipole and El Nino. However, the catch increased during the latter half. It proves that there has been steady recruitment."

According to principal scientist U Ganga, multiple spawning and recruitment ensured the steep rise in oil sardine catch in the last three months of 2024, but the size of the fish was small and fishermen said it was not tasty. "This may be because the oil sardine caught during the period were juvenile. The reason for change in taste may be because of a lack of nourishment. However, now the sardine stocks are healthy and this year we have found that the population of gravid females is healthy," said Ganga.



Fish landings in state

Total in 2024:

6.10 lakh tonnes

2023: 6.33 lakh tonnes

Major species caught, in 2024

Oil sardine:

1.49 lakh tonnes

Indian mackerel:
61,490 tonne

Penaeid shrimp:
44,630 tonnes

Anchovy: **44,440 tonnes**

Threadfin bream:
33,890 tonnes



Species with rise in landing*

Oil sardine: **7.6%**

Lesser sardine: **37%**

Anchovy: **27%**

Lizard fish: **60%**

*Year on year

