

## **Centre announces pilot project to boost livelihoods of fish farmers in Kerala's Kuttanad**

Kochi, Aug 23 (PTI) Union Fisheries Minister George Kurian on Saturday announced a pilot project in the Kuttanad region aimed at improving the livelihoods of local fish farmers. The programme, discussed at a consultative meeting at the ICAR–Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI), will introduce both modern and traditional aquaculture practices to help revive the local economy, according to an official release.

Plans include integrated and cage fish farming, the eco-friendly "one fish, one paddy" method, and biofloc fish farming. Fish Farmers Producers' Organisations (FFPOs) will also be set up to give local communities greater control and improve operational efficiency, the release said. "Enhancing the livelihoods of the region's farmers is the primary goal of this initiative," Kurian was quoted as saying.

Under the pilot project, extensive training programmes will be conducted to equip farmers with skills in aquaculture and related practices. The initiative will also encourage start-ups in the sector, focusing on post-harvest activities such as processing, cleaning, packing, and fish trade, thereby creating employment opportunities and adding value to the produce, it added. Given the diverse aquatic environments of Kuttanad, the project will be divided into separate freshwater and brackish water farming practices, tailored to the distinct conditions of Upper and Lower Kuttanad.

The expertise of premier research institutions, including ICAR institutes, central agencies, and Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs), will be tapped to provide technical and scientific support. Kurian noted that a detailed project report would be prepared immediately to ensure swift and effective implementation of the initiative, which is expected to bring significant and sustainable economic benefits to the region. Former Union Minister Rajeev Chandrasekhar, Fisheries Development Commissioner Dr Mohammed Koya, CMFRI Director Dr Grinson George, CMFRI Principal Scientist Dr Imelda Joseph, and representatives from various ICAR fisheries institutes, central government agencies, and KVKs attended the meeting.