

CMFRI cautions against fishing of juvenile sardine, urges following MLS criteria

The ICAR-Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI) has called on fishers to adhere to sustainable harvest practices and respect the Minimum Legal Size (MLS) of 10 cm for the Indian Oil Sardine, following a significant increase in juvenile sardine populations along the Kerala coast. "Juvenile fishing should not be practised under any circumstances. Protecting young fish is essential to ensure the long-term sustainability of the sardine fishery - Dr Grinson George, CMFRI Director"

The CMFRI emphasised that compliance with MLS is critical for safeguarding both the livelihoods of coastal communities and the long-term sustainability of the sardine fishery, a key source of protein and income. A recent CMFRI study revealed an unprecedented surge in sardine recruitment during 2024, the highest recorded since 2020. The growth has been supported by favourable rainfall patterns and monsoon-driven upwelling, which enriched coastal waters with nutrients and boosted microplankton availability, providing ample food for young sardines. However, the surge has also led to heightened competition among recruits, resulting in lower weight gain for zero-year-class fish.

Addressing widespread misinterpretation of the study, CMFRI Director Dr Grinson George clarified: "Our findings do not imply that juvenile sardines will not grow further. Juvenile fishing should not be practised under any circumstances. Protecting young fish is essential to ensure the long-term sustainability of the sardine fishery and the livelihood security of fishing communities." The institute recommends a regulated harvest targeting only fish above the MLS. Dr George noted: "While coastal waters remain productive and recruitment is high, effective exploitation should be limited to fish above the MLS to maintain sustainability."

CMFRI Principal Scientist, Dr U. Ganga, added: "The sardine fishery is highly sensitive to environmental shifts, leading to characteristic 'boom and bust' cycles. Preventing juvenile fishing and following sustainable practices are crucial to mitigate the risk of the next downturn in this vital coastal resource." CMFRI's advisory underscores the importance of sustainable fishing practices in preserving the economic and ecological value of the Indian Oil Sardine, a cornerstone of Kerala's small-scale fisheries sector. Compliance with the MLS not only supports the recovery of sardine populations but also ensures the long-term resilience of coastal livelihoods and food security in the region.