

CMFRI urges fishers to comply with minimum legal size for sardine fishery

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Kochi: The Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI) urged fishers to adhere to sustainable harvest levels and comply with the minimum legal size (MLS) of 10cm for the Indian oil sardine, in light of a remarkable resurgence of young sardines observed along the Kerala coast. CMFRI maintained that MLS is crucial for protecting both livelihoods and food security while ensuring the long-term sustainability of the sardine fishery.

A recent CMFRI study revealed a phenomenal surge in sardine recruitment during 2024, the highest since 2020, supported by favourable rainfall patterns and monsoon-re-



File pic

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lated upwelling of nutrient-rich waters that boosted microplankton growth, leading to a massive influx of young fish into coastal waters. The surge in young sardines also led to increased competition for food among recruits, resulting in lower weight gains for zero-year-class fish.

It also pointed out that ecosystem productivity indicators — especially the micro-

plankton component of chlorophyll-a — played a stronger role in sardine recruitment than the traditionally emphasised spawning stock biomass. The marine heatwaves phenomenon varied in intensity and duration in the three eco-regions and likely affected maturation and distribution trends of oil sardine spawners.

With climate change intensifying these fluctuations, CMFRI researchers called for the development of species-specific, short-term fishery forecast models and dynamic local harvest rules to ensure sustainability. “It has come to notice that our study is widely misunderstood regarding sardine growth, wrongly assuming that the fish will not

grow further. The study does not imply such interpretation,” said Grinson George, CMFRI director, reiterating that juvenile fishing should not be practised under any circumstances. He emphasised that protecting young fish is vital to ensure the long-term sustainability of the sardine fishery and the livelihood security of fishing communities.

“Sardine fishery is highly influenced by environmental shifts, causing fluctuations that define the fish’s characteristic ‘boom and bust’ cycles. Curbing juvenile fishing and following sustainable practices are crucial to prevent the next ‘bust’ for this vital coastal resource,” CMFRI principal scientist U Ganga said.