

CMFRI launches 'Shark Aware' app and e-learning module to protect marine ecosystems



Ernakulam: Sharks and rays play a crucial role in maintaining the balance and health of marine ecosystems. However, overfishing and limited scientific awareness have placed several of these species at risk of decline and possible extinction. In a significant step towards marine conservation, the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI), the premier tropical marine fisheries research body based in Ernakulam, has launched a new technological initiative titled the 'Shark Aware' app along with an interactive e-learning module aimed at identifying and protecting rare shark and ray species.

The 'Shark Aware' mobile application is designed to help fishermen, fisheries officials, and researchers accurately identify whether sharks and rays caught during fishing activities are protected under the Wildlife Protection Act, as amended in 2022. The app provides comprehensive details on species listed under various schedules of the Act, along with information on international trade restrictions. It includes images, scientific names, anatomical features, and distinguishing characteristics, enabling users to determine at sea whether a catch is legally protected or prohibited.

Developed with a focus on ease of use, the app aims to prevent the illegal capture and trade of protected marine species, thereby strengthening conservation efforts. Alongside the app, CMFRI has also introduced a digital e-learning platform that offers simplified educational content on sharks and marine ecosystems. The module is designed for students and the general public and includes interactive quizzes and real-time assessments to enhance learning and awareness.

The initiative was led by Dr Livi Wilson, Senior Scientist at the Finfish Fisheries Division of CMFRI, with financial support from the National Fisheries Development Board (NFDB). It marks a significant advancement in the use of technology for marine biodiversity conservation and the prevention of illegal fishing practices.

Fisheries Minister E V Abdul Ghafoor officially launched the 'Shark Aware' app and e-learning module at a ceremony attended by several dignitaries, including B. Abdul Nasser, Special Secretary of the Fisheries Department; Dr. Grinson George, Director of CMFRI; Chelsa Sini V, Director of Fisheries; and Dr. Shobha Jo Kizhakkudan, among others. This innovative initiative is expected to play a transformative role in marine resource protection and the promotion of sustainable fishing practices, marking an important milestone in India's marine conservation efforts.