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ICAR-CMFRI advises against avoiding tuna over parasite reports from other regions

Kochi, Sep 24 (PTI) The ICAR-CMFRI has advised consumers against avoiding tuna or other commercially available fish over reports of parasitic infections in fish from a specific region, officials said on Thursday. In a statement, the ICAR-Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute said fish examined along the Indian coast, including tuna, had not shown external manifestations of harmful parasitic infestation. It cautioned against generalising findings from other regions to fish caught in Indian waters. The advisory follows reports of parasites in skipjack tuna based on a study of fish from the Atlantic Ocean off Brazil.

ICAR-CMFRI said the presence and abundance of parasites could vary among individual fish and geographical regions depending on ecological conditions and the availability of intermediate or secondary hosts such as copepods. Dr Grinson George, Director, ICAR-CMFRI, said scientists at the institute regularly examine fish, including skipjack tuna, as part of fish biology studies and check for abnormalities and parasites whenever necessary. “The fish examined by the Institute do not show external manifestations of harmful parasitic infestation,” he said.

The institute further explained that variations in parasite occurrence had also been used globally to differentiate fish stocks or populations. “Therefore, findings relating to fish from one geographical region cannot automatically be applied to the same species occurring in another region,” it said. As an additional food-safety precaution, ICAR-CMFRI advised proper and prompt evisceration during fish handling and processing. The intestines and other viscera are normally removed during cleaning and processing, it said. “Proper cooking kills parasites and significantly reduces any associated food-safety risk,” the institute said.

ICAR-CMFRI noted that raw or lightly cooked seafood was consumed in some countries as part of cultural practices, where the risk could be higher if parasite prevalence in a particular locality was high and had not been properly assessed. In India, seafood is generally prepared by cooking at high temperatures, providing an additional food-safety measure, it said.

The institute emphasised that consumers need not avoid tuna or other commercially available fish merely because parasites have been reported in fish from a specific geographical region. Consumers should follow appropriate handling, cleaning and cooking practices to minimise potential risks while continuing to benefit from the nutritional value of fish and other seafood, it said.