

No need to avoid tuna over parasite reports from Brazil: Fisheries Institute

Consumers need not avoid tuna or other commercially available fish following reports of parasitic infections in skipjack tuna, the Indian Council of Agricultural Research-Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (ICAR-CMFRI) said on Thursday, stressing that findings from one geographical region should not be generalised to fish caught in Indian waters. The advisory comes after reports of parasites found in skipjack tuna based on a study of fish from the Atlantic Ocean off Brazil.

ICAR-CMFRI said parasite prevalence can vary considerably between individual fish and geographical regions, depending on ecological conditions and the availability of intermediate or secondary hosts such as copepods. The Kochi-based institute said fish examined along the Indian coast, including tuna, had not shown external manifestations of harmful parasitic infestation. “Scientists at ICAR-CMFRI regularly examine fish, including skipjack tuna, as part of fish biology studies and observe them for abnormalities and parasites whenever necessary,” Grinson George, director, ICAR-CMFRI, said. He said the fish examined by the institute had not shown external manifestations of harmful parasitic infestation.

Parasite occurrence varies across regions

The institute also pointed out that differences in parasite occurrence are used globally to help distinguish fish stocks or populations. Therefore, findings concerning fish from one region cannot automatically be applied to the same species from another geographical area.

At the same time, ICAR-CMFRI advised consumers and those involved in fish handling to follow basic food-safety precautions. Proper and prompt evisceration — the removal of intestines and other internal organs — during cleaning and processing is important, it said.

Proper cooking key to food safety

Proper cooking is another key safeguard, as adequate heat kills parasites and significantly reduces associated food-safety risks. The institute noted that the risk can differ in countries where raw or lightly cooked seafood is commonly consumed, particularly where parasite prevalence in a particular locality has not been properly assessed.

In India, where seafood is generally cooked at high temperatures, cooking provides an additional food-safety measure. “People should not stop eating tuna or other commercially available fish merely because parasites have been reported in fish from a specific geographical region. The need of the hour is appropriate handling, cleaning and cooking practices while continuing to consume fish for its nutritional benefits,” George added.