

No need to avoid tuna over parasite reports from Brazil, says government

The advisory from the agriculture ministry follows reports of parasites found in skipjack tuna based on a study of fish from the Atlantic Ocean off the Brazilian coast. The Indian Council of Agricultural Research-Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (ICAR-CMFRI), Kochi, said fish examined along the Indian coast, including tuna, had not shown "external manifestations of harmful parasitic infestation". It cautioned against applying findings from a particular geographical region to fish caught in Indian waters. "The ICAR-Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (ICAR-CMFRI), Kochi, has advised consumers not to avoid tuna or other commercially available fish solely on the basis of reports of parasitic infections detected in fish from a specific geographical region," the agriculture ministry said in a statement.

According to ICAR-CMFRI, the occurrence and abundance of parasites can vary between individual fish and across geographical regions. Such differences can depend on ecological conditions and the presence of intermediate or secondary hosts, including copepods. Grinson George, director of ICAR-CMFRI, said scientists at the institute regularly examine fish, including skipjack tuna, as part of their fish biology studies and check for abnormalities and parasites whenever necessary.

The institute also noted that differences in parasite occurrence are used globally to help distinguish between 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," ICAR-CMFRI said.

Cooking offers additional safeguard

The institute said food preparation practices in India provide an additional safety measure, as seafood is generally cooked at high temperatures. In some countries, raw or lightly cooked seafood is consumed as part of cultural practices. In such cases, the risk can be higher if parasite prevalence is elevated in a particular locality, it said.

ICAR-CMFRI advised consumers to follow proper handling, cleaning and cooking practices to minimise any potential risks. It also stressed the importance of prompt and proper evisceration during fish handling and processing. "The intestines and other viscera are normally removed during cleaning and processing. Proper cooking also kills parasites and significantly reduces any associated food-safety risk," it said. The institute said consumers therefore need not avoid tuna or other commercially available fish solely because of parasite findings reported from fish originating in a different geographical region.