



**Opinion**

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# Indian Fisheries Today



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## Opinion

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, fish output in India doubled between 1990 and 2010. India has 7517 kilometers of marine coastline, 3,827 fishing villages, and 1,914 traditional fish landing centers. With over 2.4 lakh fishing crafts operating in the coast, six major fishing harbours, 62 minor fishing harbours and 1511 landing centres are functioning to cater to the needs of over 3.9 million fisherfolk.

Indian fisheries activity ranges from deep sea fishing to lakes in the mountains, not only provides nutritional security to the food basket but also engages about fourteen million people and accounts for more than 10% of the global fish biodiversity since independence. Constituting about 6.3% of the global fish production, the sector contributes to 1.1% of the GDP and 5.15% of the agricultural GDP. It also contributes in food, health, economy, exports, employment and tourism of the country. The total fish production is around 10.07 million MT, where 65% contribution comes from the inland sector. Fish and fish products have presently reached to a level of 10.51 lakh MT in terms of quantity and Rs.33, 442 crores in value. India is a major supplier of fish in the world. In 2014-15 the country exported over 10,50,000 metric tonnes of more than 50 different types of fish and shellfish products are exported to 75 countries around the world.

**Table 1:** Indian Fisheries.

Global Position	3rd in Fisheries 2nd in Aquaculture
Contribution of Fisheries to GDP (%)	1.07
Contribution to Agril. GDP (%)	5.15
Per capita fish availability (Kg.)	9
Annual Export earnings (Rs. In Crore)	33,441.61
Employment in sector (million)	14
Resources	
Coastline	8129kms
Exclusive Economic Zone	2.02 million sq. km

Continental Shelf	0.506 million sq. km
Rivers and Canals	1,91,024km
Reservoirs	3.15 million ha
Ponds and Tanks	2.35 million ha
Oxbow lakes and derelict waters	1.3 million ha
Brackish waters	1.24 million ha
Estuaries	0.29 million ha
Some Facts	
Present fish Production	6.4mmt
Inland	3.4mmt
Marine	3.0mmt
Potential fish production	8.4mmt
Fish seed production	21,000 million fry
Hatcheries	1,070

India is a major supplier of fish in the world. In 2014-15 the country exported over 10,50,000 metric tonnes of fish. It is also second largest country in the world to produce fish from aquaculture (42.10 Lakh tones or 6.3% global aquaculture production). An overview of Indian fisheries is provided in Table 1.

One of the unique problem of Indian fishermen (is true to Sri Lankan fishermen too) is frequent arrests of fishermen of both countries and seizures of their fishing vessels by the Sri Lankan and Indian authorities in the common sea area between the two countries. The problem has been festering with political ramifications, particularly in Tamilnadu for a number of years. Post Elam war, due to gradual depletion of fishing resources in the Indian continental shelf, the relatively greater availability of fish on the Sri Lankan side, Indian fishermen have extended their fishing activities to Sri Lankan territorial waters. Moreover, Sri Lankan fishermen did not have advanced fishing implements like gill nets, modern trawlers, etc. Added to the above, Indian fishermen have also been resorting to bottom trawling (banned as per international fishing regime), which is destructive of the layout of the sea-floor, and the natural habitat for fish breeding. In other words, opportunities induced Indian fishermen to venture into the sea domain of their Sri Lankan counterparts [1].

Environmental degradation poses a host of problems, both short and long term and of local or general interest. Traditional artisanal fisher people in the southwest coastal province of Kerala, India, have been fighting a relentless battle for more than a decade against mechanized fishing vessels such as trawlers and purse seiners. The fisherfolk's livelihood is being directly threatened by these rival and powerful fishing methods. Only in the last few years have fisherfolk begun to articulate the problem of ecological damage caused by inshore mechanized fishing: overfishing and destruction of fish breeding locations on the sea bed, leading to severe depletion of marine stocks.

If one has to mention about Level of Resource Exploitation, one has to keep in mind that the inshore resource potential within the Exclusive Economic Zone is presently exploited up to 75 percent, leaving scope for marginal improvement in overall fish production from the inshore sea. However, fisheries development has not been uniform in all the states of the Indian union. Kerala, aided and abetted by the Indo-Norwegian Project and the state government, took an early lead in the development of mechanized fishing, particularly shrimp trawling [2]. Further provinces such as Kerala, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu more or less fully exploit their maximum sustainable yield while provinces of Gujarat and Karnataka had been exploiting only half of their advantage of Maharashtra. In a bid to improve the technology to increase the pelagic catches of oil sardine and mackerel in India, a large number of purse seiners have been introduced along the southwest coast of India since the mid-1970s. Magnitude of the investments made in the development of a purse seine fishery in the southwest coast of India. The country has invested Billions of dollars for purse seine But it has failed to bring in any increase in the aggregate landings of oil sardine or mackerel in the southwest coast. Even without this investment, India would not have been worse off. On the other hand, this technology, which competed with the artisanal craft and gear for the same species and space, deprived traditional fishermen of their regular catches. Bulk landings at the centers of purse seining reduced the fish prices as well [2]. Under the circumstances, the need of the hour is

- I. Proper assessment of the inshore resources and fix an optimum number of craft gear combinations of non-

motorized and motorized country craft, mechanized gill netters and a limited number of trawling boats to be carried out as a priority program at the national level.

- II. Reserve coastal waters up to a depth of 10 fathoms for the exclusive use of the artisanal units.
- III. Completely ban night trawling and stipulate a quota system of catches for each trawling boat.
- IV. Prohibit purse seining in the inshore waters.
- V. Provide Research and development support to the small-scale fisheries.
- VI. Control destructive fishing such as the use of the small-size mesh.
- VII. Develop a consciousness among the workers regarding the nature of resources and the need for management.
- VIII. Prevent indiscriminate dumping of toxic materials, industrial effluents and sewage through greater penal action against offenders.
- IX. Encourage national awareness of the need for preserving the environment. It is laudable that a national awareness campaign has been launched throughout the country, but we have a long way to go before we can achieve our goal.

Apart from the above, other current key management problems in Indian fisheries include: Inadequate fisheries regulations are lack of implementation/enforcement, lack of transparency and trace ability, failure to follow scientific advice, Flag of Convenience vessels, too few no-go areas for fishing

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