

## **Kerala fishermen seek ‘fish famine’ package from Centre**

A group of Kerala fishermen on Friday sought a “fish famine” package from the Centre to compensate the losses suffered due to a sharp decline in the availability of fish during the last three years. The demand was made during an interactive meeting with Union Minister of State for Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Sudarshan Bhagat at the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI) in Kochi.

According to the fishermen, there was a drastic decline in fish landings in Kerala after 2012, resulting in a huge loss to the fisheries sector. “The decline of sardine, which is the most consumed fish in Kerala, has left our lives in lurch. CMFRI studies show that the fisheries sector in the State has seen loss to the tune of Rs 10,000 crore,” they said.

“Many of us are debt-ridden due to this. Hence, a fish famine package is the need of the hour to support the fishermen community,” said Charles George, state president of Matsyathozhilali Aikyavedi. He also said that the Union government should consider the request of fisherfolk to form a separate Ministry for fisheries at the Centre.

They also demanded that an independent harbour be constructed at Vypeen in Ernakulam for traditional fishermen operating from this area in large numbers. The fishermen urged the Minister to include cage fish farming activities under the Prime Minister’s Mudra Bank Loan scheme.

Also, they wanted insurance protection be extended to cage fish farming to support the farmers during times of crisis. The Union Minister in his reply, said the department would take action after examining the issues raised by the stakeholders at the meeting. He said a stakeholder meeting will be conducted at CMFRI to evaluate the issues related to the pollution of Periyar river and others hampering development of fisherfolk and fish farmers.

CMFRI Director A Gopalakrishnan said the institute had set up a working group of experts for framing guidelines in connection with the National Mariculture Policy to be submitted to the Union government.