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Protest by fishermen along kerala coast over Dr. Meenakumari commission report – An economic and critical analysis

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Abstract

The study is an economic and critical analysis made on the report made by the Expert committee in India. The report is widely criticized by the scholars in the field and is vehemently opposed by fishermen in Kerala. It is blamed that the report is not the outcome of scientific research. The present article explains that there is overfishing and overcrowding of fishing vessels in Kerala especially when the trawl fishing is concerned. In Kerala the catch of high valued species like stomatopods, gastropods, penaeid prawns, rays and barakudas showed declining trend. The number of vessels also has increased and the growth rate is the highest for Kollam district (4.34%) followed by Ernakulam (2.4) and Kozhikode (1.64). With this backdrop it is unscientific to recommend to increase the number of fishing vessels in Kerala fishery. The plea of the fishermen make sense.

Keywords: Proliferation of the trawlers, deep sea fishing vessels, Exclusive economic zone, expert committee.

1. Introduction

An expert Committee appointed by the Government of India, chaired by Dr. Meenakumari, Deputy Director General (Fisheries), Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), submitted the report on the 'Comprehensive Review of Deep-sea Fishing Policy and Guidelines' to the government of India. The report touched comprehensively on all aspects pertaining to the sector of fisheries as against the report submitted in 2004. First of all the important recommendations of the report can be stated in nut shell in this article.

1.1 Summary of the Recommendations

Recommendations are made in the areas of full exploitation of catch potential in the Indian Exclusive Economic Zone and International waters, including the size of the fishing crafts and Deep Sea Fishing Vessels (here after DSFVS), scope of the exploitation of major oceanic resources, Shark Fishing, Fishing pattern and deep sea fishing in India and fishing in Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). Suggestions are made to increase the number of the fishing vessels of 20 meter Over All Length (OAL) and above brought through the Letter of Permission (LOPs) issued by the Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries (DAHD&F), Ministry of Agriculture. Guidelines are issued to allow resource specific fishing vessels to be introduced in the waters beyond 500 meter depth mainly to exploit Tuna and Tuna like resources and other commercial species such as Squids and it is recommended that a fleet size of 1178 DSFVs to be considered for deployment in the Indian Exclusive Economic zone (hereafter, EEZ). The committee considers that India is presently lacking in adequate expertise or resources to exploit waters beyond 500 meters. Hence technology transfers through acquisition of foreign fishing vessels or joint ventures/leasing etc. is recommended for this area (Expert Committee Report, 2014) [1].

It is also recommended by the committee that in the absence of trained domestic crew that can work on such DSFVs, provisions are suggested to engage foreign crew that can work on such DSFVs till the requisite skill is developed in the country. It is also solicited that keeping in view the developments in exploitation of the resources in waters beyond 12 nautical miles, there is urgent need to enact a comprehensive legislation for regulating of Indian fishing fleet in the EEZ. Besides these suggestions, it is highly wanted that the security clearance of the Foreign crew should be done in a time bound manner (Expert committee Report, 2014) [1].

1.2 Why the Fishermen protested against the recommendations?

There was a widespread protest against the report along the entire coast of Kerala. Posters appeared in every nook and corner of fishing villages. All associations of fishermen irrespective of their affiliations to the political party joined the protest and some even went on hunger strike. Is the cry of the fishermen foul? This has to be explained in detail in the context of the Kerala fishery. Various studies in Kerala Fishery from 1980 onwards reveal that there is serious erosion of net profit. Proliferation of the fishing vessels is another hazard that is discussed in the fishery of Kerala. Majority of the species landed by the fishing boats have either declined or disappeared totally. To substantiate this argument percentage share of the different species caught by the trawlers can be analysed here. Table 1.1 compares the percentage share of species in the years 2002 and 2011.

Table 1.1: Percentage share of different Species in Kerala (in 2002 and 2011)

Name of Species	Share (%) 2002	2011
Sharks	0.34	.08
Skates	0.11	0.14
Rays	0.60	0.07
Eels	0.13	0.25
Cat fish	0.02	0.00
Clupeids	0.00	0.00
Wolf herring	0.14	0.03
Oil Sardines	1.90	1.60
Other Sardines	0.06	0.05
Hilsa Shad	0.00	0.00
Other Shads	0.01	0.05
Anchovies	0.00	0.00
Coilia	0.00	0.00
Setipinna	0.00	0.00
Stolephorus	3.96	1.77
Thrissina	0.00	0.00
Thryssa	2.05	0.69
Other clupeids	0.31	0.62
Bombay Duck	0.00	0.00
Lizard fishes	3.19	4.74
Halfbeaks & full beaks	0.00	0.00
Flying fishes	0.04	0.01
Perches	0.00	0.00
Rock cods	3.68	0.45
Snappers	0.13	0.01
Pig – face breams	0.03	0.01
Thread fin breams	14.60	27.71
Other perches	5.93	1.20
Goat fishes	0.01	0.04
Thread fins	0.00	0.00
Croakers	2.07	0.87
Ribbon fishes	7.07	10.22
Carangids	0.00	0.00
Horse Mackerel	0.38	0.28
Scads	4.20	8.65
Leather – Jackets	0.02	0.01
Other Carangids	1.51	0.57
Silver bellies	2.21	0.59
Big – Jawed Jumper	0.14	0.13
Pomfrets	0.00	0.00
Black Pomfrets	0.06	0.14
Silver Pomfret	0.17	0.17
Chinese Pomfret	0.01	0.00
Mackerels	0.00	0.00
Indian Mackerel	0.73	4.53
Other Mackerels	0.00	0.00

Seer fishes	0.00	0.00
S.Commersoni	0.67	0.08
S.Guttatus	0.01	0.00
S.Lineglatus	0.00	0.00
Acanthocybium spp	0.00	0.00
Tunnies	0.00	0.00
E.affinis	0.09	0.01
Auxis.spp	0.08	0.00
K.Pelamis	0.01	0.00
T.tonggol	0.00	0.00
Other Tunnies	0.03	0.00
Bill fishes	0.00	0.00
Baracudas	1.01	0.85
Mulletts	0.01	0.01
Halibut	0.02	0.00
Flounders	4.98	5.70
Penaeid prawns	16.31	11.15
Non – Penaeid prawns	4.51	2.82
Lobsters	0.16	0.03
Crabs	1.70	0.81
Stomatopods	1.69	0.47
Gastropods	0.27	0.18
Cephatopods	12.17	11.35
Miscellaneous	0.49	0.83
Total	100.00	100.00

Source: Unpublished data from CMFRI (2012)

Table 1.1 depicts that majority of the species have declined in the catch obtained in 2011 as compared to 2002. The reasons for this can be the proliferation of the fishing vessels, environmental, biological and others. If so, why expert committee recommended for the introduction of 1178 DSFVs more to exploit the deep sea resources? Is it to sweep off the entire floor of the sea? The fishermen in Kerala highly protested against the appointment of foreign crew on the onboard of DSFVs in India. They urged the government to give them training.

There is proliferation of fishing vessels in Kerala fishery. Compound annual growth rate of the trawl fishing vessels in Kerala is done to substantiate the argument. Table 1.2 sets forth the same.

Table 1.2: Compound Annual Growth Rate of Trawlers from 1980-2009

District	Growth Rate
Thiruvananthapuram	-.05
Kollam	4.34
Alappuzha	-0.04
Ernakulam	2.42
Thrissur	0.19
Malappuram	0.34
Kozhikode	1.64
Kannur	.17
Kasargode	.28
Kerala	8.91

Source: Computed from the data obtained from MPEDA and Fisheries Offices of the Maritime Districts (2010).

With this backdrop of the proliferation of fishing vessels in Kerala, exploiting the resources from the Arabian Sea, Bay of Bengal and Indian Ocean, it is disastrous to issue guidelines to add the size of the fleet especially in Kerala. The state government has to be vigilant as not to increase the size of DSFVs in Kerala. Further, nothing will be left for the traditional fishermen.

2. Conclusion

Kerala Marine Statistics and the Census of the Fishing Population done by the department of Fisheries and the CMFRI Kochi, respectively explains that the socio economic conditions of the fisher folk in Kerala lag far behind the state average (Marine Statistics & Census CMFRI, 2010) ^[3]. A recent study done on the economics of trawl fishery in Kerala, brought out that 30.15 per cent of the trawl owners are not able to cover the net profit and 17.08 per cent do not even attain gross profit (sinitha, 2014) ^[4, 6]. It is in this backdrop the plea of the fishermen make sense. It is the need of the hour that all maritime states come together to put pressure on the government of India as not to implement the report.

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