



Government of India takes Significant Step to Strengthen Small Scale Fisheries, Fisheries Cooperatives & FFPOs

Notifies Rules for “Sustainable Harnessing of Fisheries in the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)”

Posted On: 08 NOV 2025 10:19AM by PIB Delhi

In a major step towards realizing the vision of a prosperous and inclusive Blue Economy, the Government of India on 04.11.2025 has **notified the Rules for “Sustainable Harnessing of Fisheries in the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)”**. The initiative, inspired by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi’s commitment to unlocking the untapped potential of India’s marine sector, fulfils the Budget 2025–26 announcement that envisaged an enabling framework for sustainable fisheries from the Indian EEZ and High Seas, with special focus on the Andaman & Nicobar and Lakshadweep Islands.

Empowering Cooperatives and Community-Led Models

The Rules give priority to Fishermen Cooperative Societies and Fish Farmer Producer Organizations (FFPOs) for undertaking deep-sea fishing operations and managing technologically advanced vessels. The EEZ Rules will not only facilitate deep-sea fishing but will also contribute to enhancing seafood exports by emphasizing value addition, traceability, and certification. This initiative is expected to open new horizons for the Indian marine fisheries sector through the creation of modern infrastructure and the **introduction of the mother-and-child vessel concept, allowing mid-sea transshipment under an effective monitoring mechanism** of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) regulations. In island regions of the Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep, which together account for 49% of India’s EEZ area, the use of mother and child vessels will give boost to the export of high-quality fish.

Comprehensive Support and Capacity Building

The Government will provide comprehensive support to fishers and their cooperatives/FFPOs through **training programs, international exposure visits, and capacity-building initiatives** across the value chain including processing, value addition, marketing, branding and exports. **Access to easy and affordable credit** will be facilitated under flagship schemes such as the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY) and the Fisheries and Aquaculture Infrastructure Development Fund (FIDF).

Curbing Harmful Practices, Promoting Sustainable Fishing and Mariculture

The EEZ Rules take a **firm stand against harmful fishing practices such as LED light fishing, pair trawling and bull trawling** to protect the marine ecosystem and ensure equitable fishing opportunities. To conserve biodiversity, a minimum legal size for fish species will also be prescribed and **Fisheries Management Plans will be developed in consultation with stakeholders** including state governments to restore declining fish stocks. **Mariculture practices such as sea-cage farming and seaweed cultivation will also be promoted** as alternate livelihoods in order to reduce fishing pressure in nearshore areas while increasing production without compromising environmental integrity. These measures will particularly benefit small-scale fishers and their cooperatives, enabling them to access deep-sea resources, earn higher incomes, and export high-value species like tuna to global markets.

Digital and Transparent Access Pass Mechanism for EEZ Operations

Under the EEZ Rules, an **Access Pass is required** for mechanized and large-sized motorized vessels, **which can be obtained free of cost** through the online ReALCRaft portal. The traditional and small-scale fishers operating motorized or non-motorized fishing crafts are exempted from obtaining an Access Pass. The system is designed to be fully digital, and time-bound, allowing boat owners to apply with minimal documentation, track applications in real time, and complete the process conveniently without visiting any office. This makes the entire process fast, transparent and time-saving. **Foreign fishing vessels are not allowed to get the access pass to operate in India's EEZ**, under any arrangements, in order to safeguard the interests of small-scale fishers.

ReALCRaft is also being integrated with Marine Products Export Development Authority (MPEDA) and the Export Inspection Council (EIC) for issuance of **Fish Catch and Health Certificates**, which are key requirements for exporting seafood to premium international markets. This integrated digital system ensures end-to-end traceability, sanitary compliance, and eco-labelling, thereby enhancing the global competitiveness of Indian marine products.

Regulatory Reforms, Sea Safety and Coastal Security

The Rules are brining significant reforms that **fish resources originated from the Indian EEZ beyond contiguous zone to be recognized as 'Indian origin'** under revenue and customs norms, so that it is not treated as 'import' while landing at the Indian port and it can be duly accounted under the Indian exchequer while exporting to other countries. Additionally, in order to protect the interests of small-scale fishers, the rules provide for framing a **National Plan of Action on Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing** to deter illegal fishing practices in Indian EEZ.

By providing mandatory use of transponders, the safety and security of fishermen and fishing vessels is ensured in the deep-sea. The fishermen and fishing vessels identification is ensured through mandatory use of QR Coded Aadhaar Card / Fishers ID Card. The ReALCRaft application has been integrated with *Nabhmitra* Application which is being used by the fishermen for safe navigation and operation of transponders. This will help the marine enforcement agencies including Indian Coast Guard and Indian navy to strengthen coastal security aspect as well.

Collectively, these reforms mark a major milestone in modernizing India's marine fisheries governance, empowering coastal communities through technology, transparency and inclusivity. By combining digital innovation with community-led models, the framework not only strengthens sustainable fishing practices but also enhances India's position in the global seafood trade.

Background

India's long coastline of over 11,099 km and vast area of Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of more than 23 lakh square kilometres provides livelihood support to more than 50 lakh fishermen community across 13 maritime States and UTs. Marine fisheries also plays significant role in country's blue economy by seafood exports and providing nutritional support to the millions of people. However, full potential of the country's EEZ especially of high valued resources in deep-sea including tuna resources remained underutilized till now. Countries including Sri Lanka, Maldives, Indonesia, Iran and European countries are presently catching substantial quantities of tuna fishes in the Indian Ocean region while the Indian fishing fleets had been limited to the nearshore waters and lagging behind before notification of the new EEZ rules on sustainable harnessing of fisheries.

Budget announcement (2025-26).

The Government of India in its **Budget announcement** (2025-26) had announced that 'India ranks second-largest globally in fish production and aquaculture. Seafood exports are valued at Rs. 60 thousand crore. To unlock the untapped potential of the marine sector, our Government will bring in an enabling framework for sustainable harnessing of fisheries from Indian Exclusive Economic Zone and High Seas, with special focus on the Andaman & Nicobar and Lakshadweep Islands.'

About ReALCRaft portal

The ReALCRaft portal, developed as a national online platform by the Department of Fisheries, provides web-based, citizen-centric services to marine fishers and coastal States/UTs for the registration and licensing of fishing vessels, transfer of ownership, and related processes, thereby promoting ease of doing business. At present, around 2.38 lakh fishing vessels across 13 coastal States and Union Territories are registered on the portal, including about 1.32 lakh motorized boats and 40,461 non-motorized traditional crafts. These fishing vessels will now be exempted from obtaining Access Passes for fishing in the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of India. A total of 64,187 mechanized fishing vessels, however, will be required to obtain Access Passes for EEZ operations.

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(Release ID: 2187691) Visitor Counter : 1276

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