



National Launch of Access Pass for Fishing in India's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) Opens New Horizon Marine Fisheries Sector.

Access Passes Issued Free via ReALCRaft Online to Empower Fisheries Cooperatives and FFPOs, Promote Sustainable Harvesting of High-Value Fishes, and Boost Seafood Exports

Posted On: 21 FEB 2026 3:36PM by PIB Delhi

India is endowed with a vast and diverse marine resource base, supported by a coastline of approximately 11,099 km and an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of about 24 lakh square kilometres. At present, most Indian fishing activity remains limited to 40–50 nautical miles from the coastline, while the vast EEZ, extending from 12 to 200 nautical miles remains **significantly under-utilised**, despite scientific assessments indicating substantial potential for **high-value oceanic resources**, particularly tuna and tuna-like species.

Recognising this opportunity, the Government of India announced in the Union Budget 2025–26 an enabling framework for the sustainable utilisation of fisheries resources in the EEZ and high seas, with special emphasis on the Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep, which together account for 49% of India's EEZ with an estimated marine fisheries potential of 2.48 lakh tonnes.

In pursuance of the Budget announcement and to provide a robust legal and institutional framework for fisheries in the EEZ, the Government of India notified the Sustainable Harnessing of Fisheries in the Exclusive Economic Zone Rules, 2025, on 4th November 2025, under the Territorial Waters, Continental Shelf, Exclusive Economic Zone and Other Maritime Zones Act, 1976 (80 of 1976). The Rules constitute a landmark policy initiative aimed at promoting responsible and sustainable utilisation of marine fisheries resources in the EEZ, while ensuring conservation of marine ecosystems, compliance with international obligations and enhancement of fishers' livelihoods.

Access Pass under the EEZ Rules

The Access Pass is a key instrument under the EEZ Rules to empower Indian fishers to sustainably harvest high-value oceanic resources. It aims to:

- support the transition from near-shore to deep-sea fishing,
- promote fisher organisation into cooperatives and FFPOs,
- enhance incomes through higher catch, better prices and export-compliant practices such as traceability and certification.

To further boost the Marine sector and sustainably harness the EEZ, Hon'ble Union Minister for Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying & Panchayati Raj, Shri Rajiv Ranjan Singh, launched the **Access Pass for Fishing in India's EEZ** for all 13 coastal states and UTs from KCC Ground, Veraval, Gujarat on 20th February 2026. During the launch, Hon'ble Union Minister FAHD Shri Singh **handed over the Access Passes to 37 Fishermen representing 24 Fisheries cooperative societies** from all Coastal States/UTs of India.

During the **national launch of the Access Pass** initiative held yesterday in Veraval, the Hon'ble Union Minister handed over passes to selected fishermen from **13 coastal States/UTs**. The beneficiaries included **Chandra Sekhar Mohanty and Om Prakash Swain from Odisha**, affiliated with *Utkal Marine Primary Fish Production & Marketing Co-operative Society Ltd.*; **Bommidi Ramakrishna and Mylapalli Lakshman Rao from Andhra Pradesh**, representing *Dargha Centre Fisheries Cooperative Society* and the *AP Mechanised Fishing Boat Operators Association, Visakhapatnam*; **Agnel Savarok Mankar and Spruha Pushkar Bhute from Maharashtra**, linked to *Vasai Machhimar Sarvodaya Sanstha* and *Ratnagiri Taluka Purse Seine Association*; **Sadananda Sheena Maben and Devaraj Karkera from Karnataka**, both from *Ala Samudra Meenugarara Prathamika Seva Sahakari Sangha, Malpe*; **Jayamathi and Gunabalan from Puducherry** of the *Kilinjalmadu Sea Fishermen Cooperative Society*; **Antony Jeyabalan and N. Pugal Selva Mani from Tamil Nadu** representing the *Tharuvaiikulam Fishermen Cooperative Society*; **Sanjeeb Babu from Kerala** linked to the *Boat Owners' Association, Kollam*; **Siddhartha Dsouza and Ivor Domnic Dsouza from Goa** of the *Mandavi Fishermen Marketing Cooperative Society Ltd.*; **Jagadish Nathu Charaniya and Sejal Varjangu from Daman & Diu** associated with *Shri Mahasagar Fisheries Co-op Society, Vanakbara* and *Shri Mahakaleshwar Fisheries Co-op Society, Saudwadi*; **Subodh Kandar and Radha Krishna Manna from West Bengal**; **Ummer Farook E.P from Lakshadweep**; **Durai Selvam and T. Devaraju from Andaman & Nicobar Islands**, representing the *Andaman Mechanized Vessels Welfare Association* and the *Sree Sai Jyothi Fisheries Cooperative Youth Society Ltd.*; and **Mukesh Premji Panjari along with other fishermen from Gujarat**, belonging to *Porbandar Machhimar Boat Association, Shree Rameshwar Matsyodhyog Sahakari Mandali Ltd.*, and *Shree Veraval Samast Kharwa Samaj*, among others. The Minister highlighted that the initiative marks a major step toward safer, more transparent, and better-regulated marine fishing operations across India

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 Registration and Licensing of Fishing Craft (ReALCRaft) portal. The ReALCRaft portal, developed as a national online platform by the NIC and 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. ReALCRaft is also 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.

Further, the Department of Fisheries plan to roll out structured training and **capacity-building programmes through CIFNET, FSI and in partnership** with coastal States/UTs to equip fishers with deep-sea fishing skills, safety awareness and export-grade handling practices.

A **Joint Working Group** of Department of Fisheries with Ministry of Cooperation has also been constituted to actively promote the participation of small-scale fishermen and strengthen fisheries cooperatives in deep-sea fishing, post-harvest management, processing and export value chains

Salient Features of the Access Pass

1. Protection for Small and Artisanal Fishers

Traditional non-motorized fishing crafts are exempted from the requirement of an Access Pass. Only mechanised fishing vessels(approx. 64,000) and large motorised vessels above 24 metres are required to obtain the Pass. This ensures that small and artisanal fishers remain protected and their livelihoods safeguarded.

2. Upgraded ReALCRaft Digital Platform

The ReALCRaft platform has been upgraded to support a seamless and user-friendly Access Pass process. ReALCRaft is already widely used by States/UTs and fishers for vessel registration and licensing.

3. Zero-Fee, Fully Online Access Pass

The Access Pass is issued free of cost, entirely through the ReALCRaft portal in a time bound and transparent manner. Once approved, the Pass is delivered digitally to the fisher's registered mobile number or email, ensuring transparency and ease of access.

4. Single-Window System for Global Exports

The ReALCRaft portal is integrated with the MPEDA portal for Catch Certificates and with EIC for Health Certificates, creating a unified single-window digital ecosystem. This integration enhances traceability, reduces procedural delays and facilitates access to premium international seafood markets.

Background: Welfare and Safety measures for Fishers

The Department of Fisheries is implementing several initiatives to improve the prosperity and safety of fishing communities. To enhance sea safety, the Government of India is installing **one lakh transponders, free of cost, on fishing vessels** across the country. Over 50,000 transponders have been installed so far, enabling real-time vessel tracking, two-way communication, distress alerts and weather warnings, **even beyond mobile network coverage**. By linking vessels with agencies such as the Indian Coast Guard, this initiative significantly enhances fisher safety during adverse weather and emergencies. Additionally, nearly **6 lakh fisher families** receive annual livelihood support during fishing bans and lean seasons, and accident insurance coverage has been enhanced to ₹5 lakh, **benefiting more than 33 lakh fishers nationwide**.

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(Release ID: 2231184) Visitor Counter : 314

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