

India moves to development phase of national action plan for inland small-scale fisheries

India sets target of 30 million tonnes in fish production in next 5 years, says Union Fisheries Secretary

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India has moved into the development phase of a separate national action plan for inland small-scale fisheries, with a focus on livelihood improvement, enhanced coordination and better management of freshwater resources. Dr Abhilaksh Likhi, Secretary, Department of Fisheries, Government of India on Friday formally launched India's development phase of the National Plan of Action (NPOA) for small-scale inland fisheries. The plan is being developed under the framework of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO). The initiative is being led by the Union Department of Fisheries in collaboration with the Bay of Bengal Programme Inter-Governmental Organisation (BOBP-IGO).



A two-day national workshop in Bhopal identified key priorities for developing the action plan, including a proposed programme of consultations with fishing communities and other stakeholders. Experts from fisheries institutions and stakeholders prepared a framework for the activities to be undertaken in the development phase. Addressing the gathering, Dr Abhilaksh Likhi called for a mission-mode outreach programme to take India's proposed national action plan for sustainable inland small-scale fisheries to fishing communities across the country. "The document must translate into practical improvements in livelihoods rather than remain confined to government offices", he said, adding that the proposed plan must prioritise sustainability amid climate crisis, and strengthen value chains to improve fishers' income.

30 million tonnes fish production in next 5 years

Dr Likhi further said: "India has set a target of 30 million tonnes in fish production over the next five years, while seafood exports are expected to rise to Rs 1.25 lakh crore". Highlighting the sector's current status, he said India had achieved an annual fish production of 19.7 million tonnes, with inland fisheries contributing approximately three-fourths of this output, while seafood exports had crossed Rs 70,000 crore.. However, Fisheries Secretary stressed that production and export growth must go hand in hand with securing the livelihoods of small-scale fishers. On sustainability, Dr Likhi flagged climate change and deteriorating water quality as major concerns for inland fisheries, pointing to challenges such as declining oxygen levels in water bodies. He said the plan must incorporate measures to build climate resilience, drawing on the experience of fishing communities who directly confront these challenges.



Diversity

"India's diverse inland fisheries sector, with its varied ecosystems, fishing communities and region-specific challenges, could serve as a model for the FAO to collaborate, pilot region-specific approaches and take the learnings to wider geographies. The experiences of fishing communities across the country could help shape context-specific approaches to sustainable fisheries management and livelihood development, offering valuable lessons for wider application", Secretary Likhi added. The proposed plan covers fisheries in rivers, canals, reservoirs, lakes, floodplain wetlands, tanks and cold-water systems.



“The development phase is expected to address issues relating to fishing rights and resource management, employment and decent work, gender equality, value chains and post-harvest trade, as well as disaster risks and climate change”, said Dr P Krishnan, Director of BOBP-IGO. The plan will be finalised through stakeholder consultations before its public launch next month and subsequent implementation.



Madhya Pradesh Fisheries Secretary Swantantra Kumar Singh, Joint Secretary Dr Gunjan Krishna and FAO Project Officer Giulia Gorelli also spoke on the occasion.

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