

IMPORTED FISH

CAUGHT IN A CATCH-22 SITUATION

● With trawling ban in place, fish from Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh will flood the market

● While the Fisheries and Food Safety Department claims to be conducting regular inspections, there are apprehensions over the quality of fish

● Meera Suresh

Trawling ban has come into place. For the coastal district of Ernakulam, which relies heavily on a fish-based diet, the next 52 days will see the prices of fish, of different varieties, increasing by, at least, 20-30 per cent.

But, the lean period is a boon for fisherfolk in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, as large quantities of fish will be sent to the Kerala markets to meet the demand.

"We anticipate the shortage and stock fish for at least the first 10 days. This time too we have done this. The ban in Tamil Nadu will get over by June 15, after which stock will come in from the Chennai, Nagapattinam and Thoothukudiyar harbours. The majority however, is from Chennai as the harbour alone has over 2,000 boats," said Cochin Long Line Boat and Gillnet Buying Agents Association general secretary M Majeed.

Quality of fish

The marine products bought to Kochi from Tamil Nadu and



Andhra Pradesh are taken directly to the markets. "We have no part in this. The harbours in Kochi only deal with the catch we procure," adds Majeed.

For the same reason, they cannot assure about the quality of the imported fish. "From our experience, the fish from Tamil Nadu are relatively safe. But, there are complaints that the ones brought in from Andhra are contaminated," says Majeed.

Though the Fisheries Department claims to be conducting regular inspections and checks during the traw-

ling period, sources say adulterated fish are abundant in the market.

According to the department, periodic checking will be conducted from the night of the trawling ban to prevent the sale and use of contaminated fish. "We work in collaboration with the Food Safety Department. Today, we did an inspection at Kalamukku and the samples were sent to the laboratory for inspection. But, we have no rights to take action against erring vendors. It is the responsibility of the Food Safety Department to do that. However, there is an in-

struction from the District Collector to do regular inspections in this regard," said Joice Abraham, assistant director, Fisheries Department.

The Food Safety Department has given the assurance that checks are being done. "We are collecting samples and sending them for detailed inspection. As of now, we cannot say the fish from Andhra are contaminated. We have to wait for the lab report. But, every harbour and market in the city is under our scanner," says Jacob Thomas, assistant commissioner, Food Safety Department.



(File) Fish kept at market for sale. (Right) Boats docked at harbour after trawling ban. ● Express

CIFT kit

Though the rapid detection kit, developed by Central Institute of Fisheries Technology (CIFT), was mooted as a means to detect adulteration in fish, the technology, according to fisherfolk, isn't flawless. "We have had experiences wherein the kit showed contamination for a fresh catch," says Majeed. The kit consists of simple paper strips, reagent solution and a standard chart for comparison of results. According to a CIFT spokesperson, the technology was handed over to the Mumbai-based HiLabs which was entrusted with the task of mass production and marketing of the kit.

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— Joice Abraham,
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