

In Kerala, formalin, a toxic and carcinogenic chemical commonly used for preserving corpses, and ammonia are widely used for preserving fish during transportation.

New kit in town, coz something is fishy here

DHINESH KALLUNGAL @ Kochi

STUNG by the growing incidence of fish adulteration, Kochi-headquartered Central Institute of Fisheries Technology (CIFT) is developing a cost-effective and user-friendly test kit to check the quality of fish sold in the market. Once the kit is developed and launched, consumers will be able to test the level of toxic chemicals like ammonia and formalin in fish procured from the market and local vendors. The CIFT, the only technology institute in the country in

ence of hazardous chemicals in fish. Recently, a consignment of red snappers transported to Mangaluru from a Kochi-based marine products export firm had caused food poisoning among 150 persons who consumed it. "The initial investigation showed that the fish was part of a consignment brought to Kochi from South Africa by sea. According to CIFT scientists, the poisoning was caused by harmful algal blooms (HAB). It is suspected that local fishermen caught the fish from the Diego Garcia area where the fish feed on the toxic bloom," said CIFT Biochemistry Lab HoD and principal scientist Sushela Mathew.

Meanwhile, the government's decision to give the right to test the quality of fish imported from foreign countries to NABL-accredited laboratories, mostly in the private sector, has raised many eyebrows.

"The decision is astonishing, following which Customs authorities have stopped sending samples of imported fish to the CIFT. Entrusting private laboratories with the task of conducting chemical and micro-biological tests would worsen the situation," said CIFT officials.

The situation is very jittery in the domestic market also, where adulteration is much higher. "Adulteration has been taking place across the retail chain, done with the aim of increasing the shelf-life of fish to the maximum," said Fisheries Department joint director Ashraf.

Why now?

Development of the kit assumes significance considering the fact that the lion's share of the 5.24 MT marine fish produced in the State every year is exported, while the annual per capita fish consumption is 19.2 kg. The shortfall is met by sourcing fish from neighbouring states and foreign countries, which is often highly adulterated.

the fisheries sector, caters to a broad spectrum of activities including harvest and post-harvest operations. Speaking to Express, CIFT-Kochi principal scientist Satyen Kumar Panda said development of the test kit was progressing at the CIFT lab. The user-friendly kit could be used at home to detect pres-

The Food Safety Commissionerate has only three labs in Kerala to test fish samples.

5.24 L
metric tonnes (2014-15)

SUVAJITH DEY

₹6,000

- ₹10,000 the current average expense for conducting chemical test on each sample, at FSSAI labs

23,129
motorised

986
mechanised

is the current fish production in state as against the estimated maximum sustainable yield of about 7.5 lakh metric tonnes

1,673
non-motorised units.

THE FLEET OF FISHING VESSELS REGISTERED IN STATE

MARINE FISH PRODUCTION (IN LAKH MT)



Health problems associated with high exposure of fish to chemicals include cancer and liver diseases. It also affects the immune and endocrine systems.

Long-term exposure to chemicals that are unfit for human consumption will affect the functioning of internal organs. Excessive use of ammonia leads to mouth and stomach ulcers.