

# Fisheries scheme has no relief component

## PMMSY plans to double incomes

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Though the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY) was announced as part of the Centre's economic stimulus package in response to COVID-19, it does not seem to contain any components aimed at relief or financial assistance to provide immediate help for the hard-hit fisheries sector.

The PMMSY will increase fish production by 9%, double incomes of fishers and double export earnings by 2024-25. Fisheries Minister Giriraj Singh said at a press conference on Tuesday to announce the details of the scheme. It involves investments of more than ₹20,000 crore from Centre, the States and beneficiaries over a five-year period.

However, he dismissed the demand for immediate financial assistance for fish workers, especially in light of huge losses during the lockdown, through cash benefit transfer. "This scheme is focused on infrastructure investments that will help fish workers to boost their incomes," he said.

"Due to coronavirus restrictions and previous climate reasons, fishers have not been able to go to sea for several months. Now Cyclone Amphan has also hit fish workers on the east coast and the annual monsoon fishing ban will come into effect in a few days. Given the huge loss of income, we had asked the Centre to give a financial assistance of ₹10,000-15,000 a month for each fish worker family," said T. Peter, general secretary of the National Fishworkers Forum (NFF).

In late March, in the early stages of the lockdown, the



Giriraj Singh releasing a booklet on the scheme to boost the fisheries sector.

Fisheries Ministry responded to the NFF's demand by sending letters to the State governments asking for estimates on losses to fishworkers, leading to hopes that the stimulus package would provide such support.

"We have heard nothing further from the Ministry after those initial discussions and the package announced by the Finance Minister has nothing much for small and traditional fishers," said Mr. Peter.

Anil T. Varghese from the secretariat of NFF in Delhi said, "The Ministry itself put out a statistics handbook in 2019 with clear estimates of number of fish workers in each State and their average earnings."

### Fishing ban

On Monday, the Ministry reduced the duration of the annual fishing ban in the monsoon season from 61 days to 47 on the demand of mechanised fishing boat owners, saying it was to provide COVID-19 relief.

"The ban is there for important environmental reasons to ensure that fish spawning can take place during the monsoon and regeneration of fish stock," Mr. Peter said.