

# Marine Fishing

Benoy Peter and Vishnu Narendran

Traditional fishers from five Indian states were found engaged in marine fishing from the Kerala coast during 2017. Fisher folk from Sundarbans region in West Bengal, Puri, Khorda, Cuttack and Baleswar districts on the Odisha coast, Srikakulam and Vizianagaram districts in coastal Andhra Pradesh, Udupi district in Karnataka, and Kanyakumari, Cuddalore, Thoothukkudy and Ramanathapuram districts in Tamil Nadu work in boats that operate from the Kerala coast.





CMID/Savanan R.S.

## Marine Fishing in Kerala

India is the second largest fish producing country in the world.<sup>i</sup> Marine fishing, inland fishing and aquaculture constitute the fishing sector. In 2015, nearly 30 per cent of the total marine fish landings in the country were from the southwest region of the west coast, comprising Kerala, Karnataka and Goa. With a coastline of 590 km dotted with 222 marine fishing villages, Kerala contributes almost half of the total landings from the region.<sup>ii</sup> The number of fisher folk actively<sup>1</sup> engaged in fishing during 2015-16 in the state was 233,126.<sup>iii</sup> Major fishing harbours in Kerala include Vizhinjam in Thiruvananthapuram district, Neendakara and Azheekal in Kollam district, Cochin and Munambam in Ernakulam, Ponnani in Malappuram, Bepore and Puthiyappa in Kozhikode, and Azhikkal in Kannur district.<sup>2</sup> Fishers in Kerala use crafts that vary from Catamarans that return on the same day to trawlers fitted with modern navigation equipment that take more than ten days on a single trip. Trawlers require at least 10 to 15 workers on board.

Like several other sectors in the state, fishing too faces acute labour crunch and many boat owners in Kerala find it difficult to get labourers. While there is an attrition from the labour force as the senior fishers retire, very few young men from the state find fishing as an attractive means of livelihood. A combined outcome of this is a diminished native labour force. The shortage of labour is addressed by engaging workers from other states. Traditional fishers from five Indian states were found engaged

1. Engaged in fishing for livelihood and registered with the Kerala Fishermen's Welfare Fund Board.
2. The study covered all the above major harbours and several of the minor harbours.

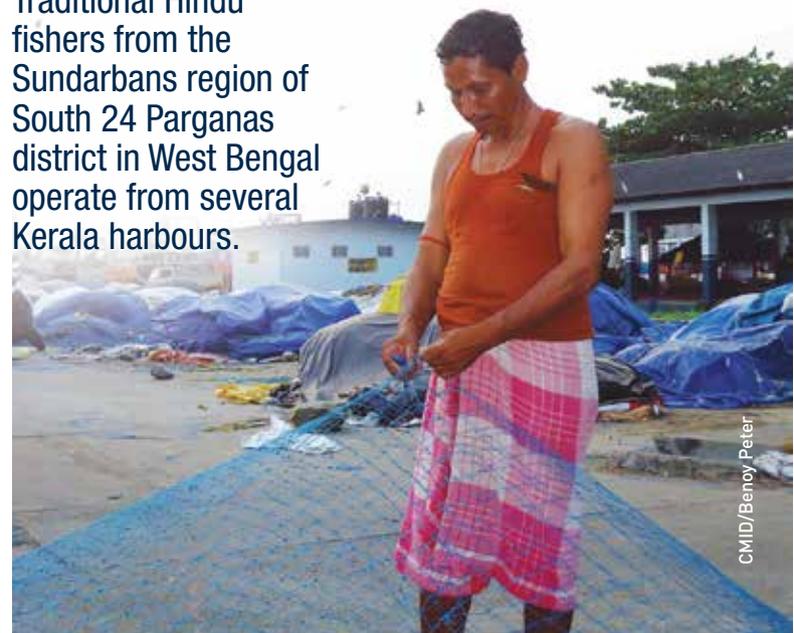
Cover image: CMID/Savanan R.S.

in marine fishing from the Kerala coast during 2017. Fisher folk from Sundarbans region in West Bengal, Puri, Khorda, Cuttack and Baleswar districts on the Odisha coast, Srikakulam and Vizianagaram districts in coastal Andhra Pradesh, Udupi district in Karnataka, and Kanyakumari, Cuddalore, Thoothukkudy and Ramanathapuram districts in Tamil Nadu work in boats that operate from the Kerala coast. Besides the traditional fishers, men from several districts in Assam and West Bengal, with no prior experience in fishing, are also engaged in the fishing boats. Among the major harbours visited as part of the study, Vizhinjam was the only harbour where migrant workers were not engaged in significant numbers.

## Labour Migration to the Sector

Fishers from Tamil Nadu, particularly from Kanyakumari district, have been historically present across the harbours in the state. In the absence of sufficient facilities such as harbours, auction halls and cold storages in their native district, a lot of the

**Traditional Hindu fishers from the Sundarbans region of South 24 Parganas district in West Bengal operate from several Kerala harbours.**



CMID/Benozy Peter

fishers from Kanyakumari operate their mechanised boats from the Kerala coast. Known for their exceptional fishing skills as well as their willingness to undertake deep sea fishing expeditions, fishers from Kanyakumari captain most of the trawlers that operate from Kerala. Colachel in Kanyakumari and Rameswaram in Ramanathapuram are two major pockets in Tamil Nadu from where fishers come to Kerala. Fisher folk from Mangalore region operate from the harbours in the northern Kerala, such as Azhikkal in Kannur. Fishers from Andhra Pradesh were also found engaged in boats that operate from Azhikkal. Vizianagaram and Srikakulam were the districts of origin as reported by these fishers. Migrant fishers from all states were men and most of them were hired through their social network.

and if we are captured, levy is charged’ said one of them. ‘The turtles get trapped in the net and die. The net also gets destroyed’, another added.

## Work and Life

For those who have never worked in the sector, it takes several months to master the required skills. They start off their work on board by learning how to sort different kinds of fish. According to a boat owner from Munambam, a minimum of four to five migrant labourers are employed as deck hands in each trawler boat operating from Munambam. In most boats, the system of payment for these fishers is based on the share of the catch. Usually the captain gets a double share in addition to allowances and the rest of the crew get single shares. Since these boats go for multi-day fishing trips which last for 10 to 15 days, most migrant fishers live in the boats. Some live in rented rooms near the harbour, provided by the boat owner.

## Fish Processing

Fish processing in Kerala heavily depends on migrant labour although local workers are present. Aroor in Alappuzha district and Neendakara and Sakthikulangara in Kollam district are the major fish processing hubs. Both migrant men and women work in the fish processing units. Migrants are recruited through contractors and agents. There is a significant presence of single migrant women and girls in the fish processing industry. Most of the workers reported Assam, Karnataka, Odisha, Jharkhand and Nagaland as their native states. Workers live in the hostels/dormitories provided by the management inside the company campus. Migrants also work at fishing harbours as helpers loading and unloading fish. The ice plants too engage them. Most of such workers were found to be from Assam, West Bengal, Odisha and Jharkhand.

The nesting of Olive Ridley Turtles along the Odisha coast and related conservation measures push fisher folk from Odisha to migrate to other states including Kerala.

Migrants from eastern Indian states West Bengal, Odisha and Assam were found working in the boats operating from various harbours in the state. While there were traditional fishers from West Bengal and Odisha among them, there were also migrants who started working in the sector only after they arrived in Kerala. Most fishers were engaged in the trawlers. But there were also those who worked in other types of boats. Traditional Hindu fishers from Kakkwip in the Sundarbans region of South 24 Parganas district in West Bengal operate from several Kerala harbours. Chances of earning a better income is what tempted most of these workers to travel thousands of kilometres to work in Kerala. They also mentioned about the exploitations of the boat owners in their native places as another reason for traversing to Kerala. Baleswar, Cuttack, Khorda and Puri were the districts of origin of fishers from the Odisha coast. Odiya fisher folk mentioned that due to the presence of the turtles (Olive Ridley Turtles) it is ‘risky’ to operate from the Odisha coast. ‘They (the patrol) shoot at the boats





## References

- i. Kerala State Planning Board (2017), Economic Review 2016, Kerala State Planning Board, Thiruvananthapuram: Available at: <https://kerala.gov.in/documents/10180/ad430667-ade5-4c62-8cb8-a89d27d396f1>.
- ii. Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (2016), Annual Report 2015-16, CMFRI, Cochin: Available at <http://eprints.cmfri.org.in/10897/1/CMFRI%20ANNUAL%20REPORT%202015-16.pdf>
- iii. Kerala State Planning Board (2017), Economic Review 2016, Kerala State Planning Board, Thiruvananthapuram: Available at: <https://kerala.gov.in/documents/10180/ad430667-ade5-4c62-8cb8-a89d27d396f1>.

## June 2017

### Centre for Migration and Inclusive Development

CMID is an independent non-profit think tank devoted to migration and inclusive development, advocating for and promoting the social inclusion of migrants. CMID provides evidence informed solutions for mainstreaming inter-state migrant workers in India. This sector brief was prepared based on a qualitative research undertaken by the authors across the 14 districts in Kerala during November 2016–May 2017. The study was funded by Thummarukudy Foundation. CMID also acknowledges the fellowship provided to the authors by Aajeevika Bureau during January to June 2017.



Centre for Migration and  
Inclusive Development.



📍 P.M.C. V/223A, Thuruthiparambu, Perumbavoor, Ernakulam, Kerala, India - 683542.

☎ +91 484 2595256 📧 [contact@cmid.org.in](mailto:contact@cmid.org.in)