No.30012/1/2003-FY(T-I)
Government of India
Ministry of Agriculture
Department of Animal Husbandry & Dairying

Comprehensive Marine Fishing Policy

November 2004

1.1 PREAMBLE

The Geographic base of Indian marine fisheries has 8118 km. coastline, 2.02 million sq. km. of Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) including 0.5 million sq. km. of continental shelf and 3937 fishing villages. There are 1896 traditional fish landing centres, 33 minor fishing harbours and 6 major fishing harbours which serve as bases for about 2,08,000 traditional non-motorized craft, 55,000 small scale beach-landing craft fitted with outboard motors, 51250 mechanized craft (mainly bottom trawlers and purse-seiners) and 180 deep sea fishing vessels and out of which 80 are in operation. The post-harvest infrastructure consists of freezing plants, canning plants, ice making plants, fish meal plants, cold storage and peeling sheds which together cater to a sizable labour force of one million people engaged in fishing and another 0.8 million in post-harvest operations. A large number of scientists, technocrats and other categories of personnel are involved in research, education, technology development and administration in marine fisheries. The estimated first sale value of the marine fish landings in the year 2000, was Rs. 10,200 crores. There is a lucrative and organised seafood export trade with the value of the export exceeding Rs. 6300 crores.

A large number of fin fish and shell fish stock principally consisting of sardines, Bombay-duck, ribbonfish Indian mackerel, coastal tunas, seer fishes, penaeid and non-penaeid shrimps, stomatopoda, cephalopods, croakers, threadfin breams, silver bellies and carangids trevallies, leather jackets, scads and horse mackerel are exploited using different craft and gear combinations. Presently the estimated average annual landing of fish and shellfish is around 28 lakh tonnes.

Marine fisheries within the territorial waters are the subject of maritime states whereas fisheries beyond this limit within the EEZ fall in the jurisdiction of Central Government. The Central Government besides playing an advisory role also provides funding support to the States/Union Territories for implementation of Central Sector and Centrally Sponsored Schemes. The policy initiatives are required not only for making marine fisheries sustainable and responsible, but also globally competitive so that Indian producers stand to gain in international markets. This arrangement was appropriate until

recently considering that only the resources close to the coasts of the maritime states were harvested. The global scenario with respect to marine fisheries is rapidly changing with major developments in harvesting and processing technology and consequent expansion of global markets for fish and fishery products.

The Ministry of Agriculture has been paying due attention in the past decade to the development of deep-sea fishery in the country. The declaration of Exclusive Economic Zone in 1976 facilitated exploration, exploitation and utilization of marine living resources in the sea around India extending to 200 nautical miles, thereby giving the nation immense opportunities and challenges to harvest the resources and to manage them on sound scientific basis. The past three decades have witnessed rapid initiatives by the government and private agencies in the marine fisheries sector of the country. On realization that most of the deep sea fishery resources beyond the conventional fishing limit and fishing capability of the indigenous craft can be gainfully exploited only if the upgraded and sophisticated vessels of adequate size and capabilities are inducted into the fishery and mobilization of capital and expertise indigenously to achieve this was found difficult in short span of time, the Government addressed this issue in 1981 Charter Policy.

After the expiry of five years of operation of this policy, the Government revised the policy to rectify the deficiencies noticed during its operation and to make it more beneficial to the country. Accordingly, a revised 1986 Charter Policy was pronounced. This Charter Policy envisaged acquisition of vessels by the Indian Companies either through import / construction in India or through joint venture etc. As a result of the above Charter Policy, 97 companies were permitted to operate 311 foreign fishing vessels. Besides augmenting the marine fish production in the country, the policy also facilitated greater inflow of foreign exchange through export of fish caught by these vessels. All these vessels were operating on 100% EOU basis. The conditions for acquisition of vessels of adequate type and number by the Indian companies who chartered vessels helped the growth of Indian deep sea fishing fleet within a short span.

Having laid the foundation for the Indian deep sea fishing industry, the government went ahead to broad base the initiatives through 1991 policy which envisaged joint venture, test fishing and leasing besides allowing continuing the vessels chartered under 1986 policy till the validity of their permits lasted. From the beginning of 1994, the Deep Sea Fishing Policy was criticised by various fishermen groups, mechanised fishing vessel owners, fish processors etc. In addition, a large number of representations from Members of Parliament and MLAs were addressed to Ministry demanding to stop giving licenses under the New Policy. The fishermen groups also resorted to agitation stating that their operational area is being encroached upon by the larger vessels operating under charter, joint venture, lease etc., over-exploitation of resources, under-reporting of catch and damages to craft & gear of traditional craft. Therefore, the government appointed a committee to review the deep sea fishing policy, which submitted its report in 1996. The government with minor modifications accepted all the 21 recommendations of this

Committee. As per this, the Government rescinded all the earlier policies on deep-sea fishing. It was also decided that the fishing policies of the government should be revised from time to time. Accordingly the Government of India subsequently constituted a few Committees in order to gather inputs on the availability of the fishing craft, status of marine fishing resources, issues relating to the various stakeholder groups etc.

The marine fishing policy announced by the Govt. of India in the past focused only on the developmental needs of the deep-sea sector, leaving aside similar issues pertaining to the coastal sector to the respective marine states/ UT's. Even though substantial assistance was canalized through Central and Centrally Sponsored Schemes in to the States/ UT's for the development of coastal fisheries, non-existence of an integrated policy for this sector was found to hamper fulfillment of the national objectives. Therefore in the present policy the Government seeks to bring the traditional and coastal fishermen also in to the focus together with stakeholders in the deep-sea sector so as to achieve harmonized development of marine fishery both in the territorial and extra territorial waters of our country. The theme of comprehensive marine fishing policy is enshrined in the National Agriculture Policy promulgated by this Government. It is significant that the new policy is being pronounced during the initial years of the X Five Year Plan, the elements contained therein may be gainfully used by the implementing Departments in the Central and State Governments to reach the benefits to the stake holders.

The policy objectives are: (1) to augment marine fish production of the country up to the sustainable level in a responsible manner so as to boost export of sea food from the country and also to increase per capita fish protein intake of the masses, (2) to ensure socio-economic security of the artisan fishermen whose livelihood solely depends on this vocation. (3) to ensure sustainable development of marine fisheries with due concern for ecological integrity and bio–diversity.

1.0 MARINE FISHERIES RESOURCES

The marine fishery resources of the country's EEZ stand assessed at 3.93 million metric tones as per the latest update of 2000. This resource is distributed in inshore (58%), off shore (34.9%) and deep sea (7%) waters. The major share of this resource is demersal (2.02 million tones) followed by 1.67 million tones of pelagic and 0.24 million tones of oceanic resources. The estimates also points to the fact that there is scope for further augmenting the marine fish production by about 1.2 million tones if fishing is carried out deploying resource-specific vessels, mainly in the oceanic region. Another phenomenon noticed is the depletion of resources in the coastal sector, which is either species specific or location-specific, both resulting from unsustainable fishing pressure.

The policy therefore underscores the need for a departure from the open access concept in

the territorial waters besides putting in place stringent management regimes. Promoting exploitation in the deep sea and oceanic waters would be another approach for reducing fishing pressure in the traditional fishing areas.

2.0. HARVESTING OF MARINE FISH RESOURCES

Harvesting of marine fish resources is categorised into three levels viz. (I) subsistence fishing (ii) small-scale fishing and (iii) industrial fishing.

2.1 The policy advocates protection, consideration, and encouragement of subsistence level fishermen and technology transfer to small-scale sector and infrastructure support to industrial sector.

2.2 There would be exclusive area in terms of depth and (or) distance earmarked for non-mechanised (non-motorised) traditional craft. An area beyond this would be demarcated for mechanised and motorised craft.

2.3 The area for deep sea fishing vessels including all boats above 20 m OAL and fitted with inboard engine and having chilled or refrigerated fish hold would be beyond the limits prescribed for the other two categories of vessels in 2.2 above.

2.4 Within the territorial waters, the demarcation of area for traditional, motorised and small-mechanised fishing vessels is the purview of the coastal state/union territory. Efforts would be made to harmonize the demarcation of reserved areas to the maximum extent possible so that a uniform pattern is followed in all coastal states /UT's.

2.5 Encouragement to subsistence level fishermen would include scheme to motorise the traditional craft and also providing better material and technology for their traditional craft. The country has a very large fleet of traditional craft (181284 Nos.) Motorization of the entire fleet may make fishing un-sustainable. The motorised craft with their operational limit would end up in overcrowding whereby excerting too much fishing pressure in a limited area. The Policy therefore envisages motorisation of about 50% of traditional craft allowing the remaining to carry on subsistence fishing in the near shore waters.

2.6 The small-mechanised sector would be encouraged by providing incentives for acquisition of multi-day fishing units.

2.7 Deep sea vessels would be provided with infrastructure support in terms of landing and berthing facilities. The vessels, which are landing quality fish for export would be provided with suitable incentive as in other export oriented agri-ventures.

2.8 As the bulk of incremental catch to augment annual marine fish production has to come from deep-sea sector and beyond EEZ limit, the Government would encourage introduction of more resource specific vessels of above 20 m length.

2.9 Proposals for import of resource-specific fishing vessels by wholly Indian owned enterprises would be screened and approval accorded for such imports by a designated authority in accordance with well laid out norms. These additional fishing units in the deep-sea sector would be for tuna fishing and squid jigging.

2.10 Special incentives would be provided for wholly Indian owned vessels for venturing into international waters and for concluding fishing arrangements with other nations under license etc.

2.11 Joint venture initiatives with specified equity norms for package proposals involving catching fish from the EEZ for processing at shore and export would be considered.

2.12 Fishing in Antarctic waters by Indian owned vessels or with equity participation or under license would be promoted by working out sustainable strategies.

2.13 The principle of Code of Conduct for Responsible Fishing Operations would be incorporated into every component activity.

2.14 Assessment of existing fishing capacity and plans for regulating or developing one or the other sectors of EEZ would be taken up.

2.15 The existing joint venture fishing vessels would be required to fully indigenise their operations as per the original proposal upon which permits were granted to these companies. No substitution for joint venture vessels would be permitted.

3.0 POST-HARVEST OPERATIONS

Total utilisation of harvested fish for food and non-food uses would be the central theme. Efforts would be made to fully comply with international requirements in post harvest care of catch so as to achieve highest standards in food safety. It would be also the concern of the Government to ensure that the post-harvest losses are minimised.

3.1 Implementation of international quality regimes for ensuring food safety in fish and fishery products would be carried out through the nodal agency. A regulatory body would ensure monitoring and verification of compliance. Existing domestic standards for fishery products and by-products would be harmonised with the International Standards so as to ensure quality of fish and fishery products for domestic consumption at par with global

standards.

3.2 Packaging and bar coding would be made mandatory for authorised sale of fish and fish products through registered outlets for ensuring food safety.

3.3 Consumer rights would be given due attention in domestic trade of fish and fishery products.

3.4 Hygiene in fishing harbour/pre-processing and processing centres would be streamlined through legislation.

4.0 RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Exploitation of living resources within 50 metres depth zone is showing symptoms of depletion and in certain belts in the inshore waters it tends to cross optimum sustainable levels. The policy therefore advocates a stringent fishery management system to be in place.

4.1 Though the Marine Fishing Regulation Acts (MFRA's) of coastal states and UT's have adequate provisions for management of resources and fishing operations, it is often found falling short of effective implementation. This calls for a review of the situation and prescribing a fresh model bill on coastal fisheries development and management with a re-orientation on limited access in coastal marine sector through policy initiative, sound legislation and awareness creation.

4.2 Construction and introduction of new fishing units cannot go unchecked any more. All existing boat-building yards shall be registered and construction of any new fishing unit will be after obtaining a license. Standards for fishing vessel construction, especially for those below 20m OAL need to be developed and control would be exercised through new legislation. Provisions would be made to comply with requirement of registration of vessels and Standards of Training, Certifications and Watch keeping of fishing vessel personnel.

4.2 There will be closed season on both the coasts, the duration of which would be decided by a designated authority. Such closed seasons shall be uniform for neighboring states unless the geographic or climatic conditions warrant deviations.

4.3 There would be strict ban on all types of destructive methods of fishing. The designated authority would be competent to declare any method as destructive after it is convinced so based on facts and data pertaining thereto.

4.4 Mesh sizes in different parts of the fishing gear would be regulated. Penalties would be fixed for violations of mesh regulations.

4.5 The designated authority would, if found required doing so, decide the quota for different classes of fishing vessels in any region.

4.6 Catching of juveniles and non- targeted species and discarding less preferred species once they are caught would be strictly prohibited through legislation.

4.7 Posting of observers on commercial fishing vessels and enforcing monitoring control and surveillance system (MCS) would be ensured.

4.8 A resource enhancement programme will be taken up on priority. This would include setting up of multi-species hatcheries for producing seed as required for sea ranching. Designating certain areas as marine sanctuaries and regulating capture of brood stock from these locations would be implemented.

4.9 Open sea cage culture would be promoted to rear or fatten commercially important species of fishes.

4.10 Fish aggregating devices would be promoted as a community based activity.

5.0. FISHERMEN WELFARE

Fishing is the sole livelihood for about 10 lakh fishermen households along the coastline and this policy attaches top priority to ensuring their social security and economic well-being.

5.1 A detailed enumeration of the fishermen of the entire country for making available all requisite data on the demographics of this sector would be considered. Each household would be given a card for easy identification and for settlement of claims.

5.2 Cooperative movement of fishermen would be strengthened and extended to areas where it is non-existent. Apex bodies of cooperatives of each state would be up- linked to the national body.

5.3 Uniformity in welfare schemes that are being implemented in different regions would be ensured. Schemes operated parallely by States and Centre would be rationalized.

5.4 Greater participation of cooperatives, NGOs and local self Governments would be sought in implementation of welfare schemes for fishermen, thereby reducing the direct role of Central and State Governments in the process.

5.5 Artisanal fisheries deploying OBMs and small-mechanised boats up to 12m. would be

treated at par with agriculture while small scale fisheries involving mechanised boats under 20m OAL would be treated at par with small scale industries. Fishing vessels above 20 m and fishing activity involving mother ships or factory vessels would be treated as industrial activity. The admissibility and extent of concessions for each category would be re-determined accordingly.

5.6 Full time/ occasional fishermen whose household does not own a boat would be treated at par with landless labourer and would qualify for special care and protection.

5.6 Contribution towards Insurance coverage and saving-cum-relief scheme would be restricted to the fishermen who do not own a boat.

5.7 Fishermen Housing Scheme of various descriptions would be unified and implemented as a master plan through a national agency.

5.8 Financing Institutions would be asked to give greater focus to this sector so as to eliminate exploitation of fishermen by middlemen.

5.9 Programmes to improve safety at sea and also to have an early weather warning system in place would be chalked out. The sea safety issue also would be incorporated in to MFRAs for prompt enforcement.

6.0. ENVIRONMENTAL ASPECTS

The effect of environmental factors on the health of living resources needs increased attention in tune with the international awareness on the issue. Health hazards due to consumption of fish harvested from contaminated water is also becoming a matter of great concern in many parts of the world. The agencies responsible for legislation relating to environmental pollution will be urged to implement them more stringently so that the impact of pollution on fisheries can be minimized.

6.1 Since all wastes-solid, liquid, radioactive or otherwise- find sea as their final destination, fisherman as the main stakeholder of the marine environment has to be sensitized against the land based pollution besides educating him in responsible fishing practices, which would cause the least disturbance to the marine ecosystem including mangroves. Consumers need also to be protected from the deleterious effects of consuming fish contaminated with heavy metals and other hazardous chemicals discharged from industrial establishments. The policy therefore would lay stress on the following aspects:

6.2 In order to minimise impact on coastal waters by industrial effluents, close liaison need to be maintained with Central and State Pollution Control Board for considering

suitable legislation for all industrial establishments discharging effluents in to the sea. Such regulations would be made to include Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) in effluent discharge systems mandatory.

6.3 Coastal area protection by planting mangroves with a view to producing nurseries for shrimp and fish would be introduced as a participatory programme with the active involvement of coastal people, particularly in the fishing community.

6.4 The Coastal Regulation Zone notification would review the present zonation of areas keeping in view the topography of each region and ensure that any human activity in the high tide limit (HTL) which may cause degradation of the coastal environment would not be permitted.

7.0. INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT FOR MARINE FISHERIES.

Development of infrastructure for marine fisheries is of vital importance and should have an integrated approach. The facilities would inter alia include jetties, landing centres, provision for fuel, water, ice, repairs to vessels and gear. The concept of hygienic post harvest handling of fish would also be woven into the project. The policies in this direction would be as follows:

7.1 A master plan for the development of infrastructure for the next ten years would be drawn up.

7.2 Alternatives to the present system of financing of the infrastructure projects by the centre and the state with cost sharing would be tried out. Build-Operate-Own and Build-Operate-Transfer systems through private sector initiative also would be explored.

7.3 Management of most of the facilities already created calls for improvements in terms of internal resource generation, maintenance and upkeep. These issues would be subjected to a detailed study and suitable central legislation would be introduced if found necessary.

8.0. LEGISLATIVE SUPPORT

An enabling legal framework is an essential pre-requisite for proper management and control of fisheries sector. As at present the subject of fisheries is in the state list under article 21 of the Indian Constitution, management and control of coastal fisheries is vested with the maritime states and union territories. At the same time the Union Government carries out management and control of the fishing activities beyond territorial limits in the EEZ.

8.1 Besides reviewing the existing legal frame work for regulating the fishing operations, introduction of additional legal instruments in areas such as operation of Indian flag vessels in the EEZ, introduction of new fishing units, ensuring conservation of resources, limited access fishery, fishery harbour management etc. would be resorted to.

8.2 In view of increase in the incidence of straying by small-mechanised boats into each other's territorial waters and consequent confiscation and arrest of crew, a mutually agreeable system will be brought in place with friendly neighboring countries to have a lasting solution to the problem.

8.3 Endorsing international laws and conventions in the marine fisheries sector and harmonizing the national laws with the international ones wherever necessary with active participation in the regional fisheries management bodies and greater cooperation amongst countries in the region would be given due attention. Participation in the Regional Fisheries Management Bodies (RFM) should be given due consideration for greater co-operation amongst the neighbouring countries in the region.

8.4 Areas such as use of information technology, strengthening of database in marine fisheries, Human Resource Development, eco labeling of marine products, would also be paid needed attention.

9.0 POLICY FOR DEVELOPMENT OF FISHERIES IN THE UNION TERRITORIES OF LAKSHADWEEP AND ANDAMAN & NICOBAR ISLANDS

The waters around these two Island Groups are rich in fish resource, which are currently exploited far below the exploitable limits. Fisheries – capture, post harvest operations and marketing – is still an important means of livelihood for the inhabitants of these islands. Sustainable development of fisheries is therefore considered of paramount importance for achieving the goals of food for all, economic growth and employment generation in these Islands. employment and economic well being. It is, therefore considered relevant to have the policy initiatives in respect of the two UTs are treated separately in the ensuing.

The two Union Territories are having Exclusive Economic Zone which either partially or wholly is in confluence with international waters. This makes these Island territories vulnerable to IUU Fishing by foreign flag vessels, besides being subjected to the long-term ill effects of unregulated fishing of the straddling and highly migratory species just outside the EEZ. This presupposes adoption of appropriate strategic options.

9.1 UT of Lakshadweep

9.1.1 Of the 36 Islands and a number of sunken banks and open reefs, only ten islands are inhabited. The Islands do not have any rivers or creeks. These coral atolls with a total area of 32 sq. km has a lagoon area of 4200 sq. km and territorial waters of about 20,00 sq. km. The EEZ around of Lakshadweep is about 4 lakhs sq. km. Of a total population of about 60,000, five thousand are directly involved in fishing while another 3000 are indirectly engaged in fisheries related activities for their livelihood. There has been a steady growth of fish production, which once stood at 500 tonnes during 1950 has crossed 10000 tonnes in recent years. However, the present harvest is only about 10-12% of the estimated fishable potential.

9.1.2 The scope for increasing fish production from the UT of Lakshadweep with a view to address the need for employment generation in the Islands necessitate providing the required infrastructure in the Islands for stepping up fishing operations.

9.1.3 Steps would therefore be taken to increase the fishing units upto sustainable level, while taking care to replicate the optimized design with proven success in the Islands territory. An increased supply of fishing units would attract a large number of unemployed youths towards fishing.

9.1.4 An increase in the fishing units would place greater demands on the infrastructure and delicate consumable supply base of the Islands. This would also exert pressure on live bait resources besides impacting on the product marketability both within the Islands and the mainland markets. About 85% of the fish caught currently is made up of skipjack and the yellow fin tuna resource is almost unexploited since the technology for deep long lining is not prevalent in the Islands

9.1.5 Policy for augmenting the fish production from the Islands therefore would include diversification of fishing techniques by popularizing deep water longlining for yellowfin tuna, besides promoting increase in pole and line vessels to the sustainable limits.

9.1.6 Introduction of collector vessels for servicing the augmented long line fleet and development of infrastructure in the strategic uninhabited Islands/reefs for providing service to the fishermen during fishing season would be taken up.

9.1.7 Intensifying the traditional processing techniques of smock/ drying (masmin production) would be supplemented by providing facilities for refrigerated/chilled sea water storage of the catch for transportation to the mainland prior to export. This would also serve the dual purpose of saving firewood, an essential input for producing masmin.

9.1.8 Expansion of the existing canning plant in Minicoy as a joint venture initiative would be considered.

9.1.9 With the changing life style the domestic demand for masmin is also dropping and product diversification and locating export market for improved variants of masmin

would be taken up.

9.1.10 Creation of shore-based infrastructure for berthing and landing is constrained by the fragile nature of the coastline, scarcity of electricity, unviable cost of transporting inputs from the mainland and the potential for pollution. However, essentially required infrastructure would be created which carrier vessels and supply vessels would supplement.

9.1.11 New generation fishing boats licensed for fishing in the EEZ would be encouraged to fish in the Lakshadweep waters.

9.1.12 Incorporating tagging techniques etc would intensify monitoring of the fishery resource.

9.1.13 Ornamental fish breeding and coastal cage aquaculture would be developed with a community orientation.

9.2 UT of Andaman and Nicobar Islands

9.2.1 In contrast to the Lakshadweep the A&N Island are typically oceanic in nature, volcanic in origin, characterized by low range of hills and valleys. The Islands has a coastline of 1912 km and continental shelf area of 3500 sq km. The EEZ around the Islands measuring about 6 lakhs sq km accounts for 28% of the total EEZ of the country. Out of a total population of 3.56 lakh, about 2500 full time fishermen and 400 part time fishermen are engaged in marine fishing. The present landing of 28000 metric tonnes forms only 11% of the exploitable fishery potential of 2.43 lakh tonnes.

9.2.2 Apart from the large gap between the potential and production, the strength of the Island group lies in its rich marine biodiversity, strategic geographic location, nearness to the southeast Asian markets and entrepreneurship.

9.2.3 Further development of coastal fisheries would be achieved through introduction of improved type of fibreglass craft and improved gear and introduction of intermediate class of fishing vessels.

9.2.4 Offshore fisheries would be developed through introduction of large deep sea fishing vessels.

9.2.5 Infrastructure needs for harvest and post harvest operations would be developed in identified Islands.

9.2.6. Joint venture initiative would be allowed for package proposals consisting of harvest and post harvest operation to be based in the Islands with a view to improving the employment potential.

9.2.7 A major fishing harbour and processing complex would be set up at Campbell Bay to attract investment.

9.2.8 Fishery resources survey will be conducted systematically to continuously monitor the fishery resource and its state of health.

9.2.9 Human resources development in the sector would be given priority to develop skilled manpower needed for meeting the specialised requirement.