



FIFTH NATIONAL MISSION ON CONSERVATION OF SHARKS-INDIA NMCSI-5

24th April, 2015 Hotel Yesh Park, Nellore, Andhrapradesh, India

The fifth meeting of the NMMCSI was held on April 24, 2015 at Yesh Park Hotel, Nellore. The meeting was attended by representatives of Fisheries Department from Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, Association of Deep Sea Going Shark Fishermen (ADSGAF), Central Institute of Fisheries Education (CIFE), BOBP-IGO and HSI India. The meeting was also attended by students and local fishermen groups.

A. Morning Session:

The meeting began with a silent prayer. Mr. J.Vincent Jain, Chief Executive and Member of the NMCSI welcomed all the participants. Thereafter, all the participants introduced themselves.

Dr. Ananthan, P.S., Sr. Scientist, ICAR-CIFE & Coordinator, Maharashtra State Mission on Conservation of Sharks delivered the introductory talk.

He gave a brief listing of the updates from the various meetings of NMMCSI held so far. He noted that data on shark landings has been discussed in previous meetings. Andhra Pradesh is the third largest shark landing state. However, proper landing centre facilities are not available to fishermen. There is currently a gap in the information on shark species. Key species data needs to be collected and specific sharks can then be protected. Shark conservation efforts are being hampered by the lack of implementation of existing regulations. The government needs to be more pro-active in ensuring that regulations once made, are enforced properly. Advancements in technology can be used for shark conservation. Bar coding of sharks and use of ICT tools are highly recommended.

Mr. Vangapally Srinivas, Research Assistant, Centre for Economic and Social Studies, Hyderabad has given Special Address. Mr. Srinivas talked about his experience with fisheries department in Nellore. He said that he has visited landing centres and found that marine fisheries are targeting sharks and tunas as they are more valuable. This was seen largely at Vizag and Kakinada ports. He said that in the last two decades, sharks have declined. He said that there are no controls by the government on nets or mesh size or vessels. Fishermen are currently going into deeper waters than they should be.

Mr. Hariharan, Assistant Director, State Fisheries Department, Government of Andhrapradesh said in his special address that since the current focus for all fisheries sector is on endangered species, sharks have been focused on heavily. He said that usually fishermen just go for fishing and don't care what kind of species are caught and focus only on market value.

The ban period for fishing is now being held at 60 days. However, Mr. Hariharan feels that terminologies such as "ban" should be avoided and ideally, fishermen should voluntarily avoid going into the seas during those days. This is especially important since every species of fish needs time to improve during breeding season. He said that the instead of such bans, there needs to be a positive change in fishermen's attitude. Since such bans do not affect the shoreline based traditional

fishermen and mainly affect the deep sea going mechanized trawlers, this ban is effectively on mechanized fishing.

He said that fishermen are keen to learn about alternative livelihood methods for sustaining their families during the ban period. He informed the audience that in some states, relief is given to the fishermen during this period. For instance, in Andhra Pradesh, upto 2014, 31kg rations per family per ban period was sanctioned. However, from 2015 onwards, the government has decided to give out Rs. 2000/- per family per ban period. Such a compensation is however not sufficient for them to sustain their families for 60 days.

He said that thought the fishermen have a common understanding among themselves to not enter the sea (also known as *Durai*) most fishermen still venture into the sea despite the ban and warnings. This is mainly due to the fact that fish are abundant at this time and the fishermen who dare to brave the seas during this period get a very high market value for such catch. He said that the local fisheries department has tried to educate the fishermen and convince them not to enter the sea. However, despite penalties, they still go into the sea as the money they earn from such catch in one trip is far higher than the penalties imposed. Hence, a change of mindset is required from the fishermen. He added that conservation groups should expand their focus to many more species during the ban period.

He elaborated that during May-June, fishermen get maximum catches from deep sea and by using long lines. However, since the number of field staff at the fisheries department is limited, monitoring of such fishing is often very difficult. Added to this problem is the fact that the Chief Minister has been pressurizing the department to ensure that marine catches are improved. Hence, he emphasized that cooperation from fishermen is key. They must voluntarily stop fishing in the ban period. Even though remedy offered by government during ban period is very low, the fishermen must realize the importance of conservation. They must also work on using only optimum mesh sizes.

He elaborated that certain species may be unwanted to fishermen, but they still have an important role to play in the ecological balance of the seas. For instance, big heaps of *Gunda* (local term) are set aside in many ports and sold as poultry waste. This contains larval stages of many species that are found in the local waters and hence, has an adverse effect on the species growth. He recommended that trawlers that are carrying large quantities of such *Gunda* should be confiscated as this will discourage the use of small size nets.

He then said that in Andhra, regular raids are being done at landing centres during the auction of shark species. At such times, they have found that shark meat is sold at Rs. 240/- per kg. In the fishing done in May, sharks weighing as much as 3kgs are being caught from deep sea. Further, fishermen complain that only smaller boats are being targeted while large trawlers are allowed to go scott free. Hence, more monitoring of the boats needs to be done. At the moment, Marine Police in the region is not well equipped and can't readily go into shoreline. They need to be anchored at about 100 -150 feet from shore. Hence, Coast Guard or Marine Police cannot do their job if they cannot readily enter the shoreline. State governments should also try to use the help of local fishermen to catch current errant fishermen; but fishermen are wary of providing such help. The government needs to focus on providing separate staff, tools and boats for specialized monitoring of such fishing activities.

He then said that under the regulations of MFRA, each boat has to be registered. However, not all fishermen come forward to register their boat. He explained that even if boats are transferred from one person to another, the registration has to be done. But, fishermen are not doing so and there is

not enough staff to monitor this. He said the fishermen themselves should come forward and comply with the rules.

Chief Guest Dr. Yadava, BOBP-IGO inaugurated the meeting and said that the mission was an on-going program and involved different entities. For instance, AD SGAF is involved in community involvement while BOBP-IGO works on the NPOA; which in turn needs community involvement.

He said that it is important to maintain a pragmatic view on conservation of species. Sharks are the top of the ecological pyramid in oceans and are often compared to tigers on land. Any ecosystem balances itself on the basis of the stocks that are taken. Further, climate changes also affect the dynamics of all species and dynamics of the ecosystem. In addition, anthropogenic pressures such as fishing will also affect the status of the species. Hence, some amount of sharks will be caught and need to be caught in order to maintain a balance. It is important to however reduce targeted catch of sharks.

In India, sharks and their meat have significant value as a food source and as source of livelihoods. In fact, the demand for shark meat is so high that a large quantity of salted shark meat comes in to India from Bangladesh on a regular basis. On the West Coast, fishermen from Gulf countries fish in Indian waters and barter sharks meat for fins with Indian fishermen.

Most Indian fishermen are economically not well off and have only one source of livelihood. There is, however, a change in perception among fishermen. There is greater recognition of the need for conservation. This needs to be met with clear implementation of all existing rules and regulations. Currently, there are huge efforts being made the world over through various IGOs and they look at shark conservation very holistically. Such global concerns can impact fishermen livelihoods in diverse ways. Hence, in India as well, we need to look at all of this holistically.

Shri. Swamy Swayam Bhagawan Das, Member – State Animal Welfare Board presided the meeting. He said in his presidential address that though he has been working in animal welfare for a long time, he is new to the field of shark conservation. He said that given India's large population, very few of us are involved in conservation. Hence, he was keen to attend such meetings and understand the scenario from various perspectives. Just as WHO has standards for dealing with dog menace, we also need to create standard to address the various issues of conservation.

Swamiji requested the participants to come up with a strong list of recommendations and has offered to present these to the government and the animal welfare boards on everyone's behalf.

B. Discussion Session:

After the tea break, the participants were encouraged to engage in open discussion on various issues connected with conservation and management of sharks.

1. Mr. Srinivas asked if the government provides any incentives to the fishermen for data collection /log-keeping and if there was any data on species abundance and species availability? He explained that it would be most valuable to make our entire efforts species specific. He said that in his experience, when reported data on shark stocks was compared to actual data, there were vast differences. Hence, there is a need to collect basic taxonomical data on shark species in India. He said that most agencies that funded such studies are keen to get data for their own purposes, such as developing medicines etc. They are willing to pay large money to fishermen to help collect such data. Sometimes, such alternative livelihood means are more beneficial than fishing itself. However, basic data on species status is required. Without such data, it would not be possible to go forward with any concrete conservation work. For collecting good data, fishermen and government can use the help of biotechnologists.

2. Mr. Vincent Jain said that CMFRI is the nodal agency on fisheries and fishing. They have to give importance to the activities of NMMCSI. As CMFRI is having a large network of research centre in each state the centre in-charge can play a vital role to lead research on shark and shark conservation activities.
3. Dr. Maruthapandi, Scientist B, Satyabama University expressed his interest on undertaking research on sharks. He said that if any research task assigned to him, he will carry out the research with the objectives framed with the research.
4. Mr. Jain said that Fisheries colleges and research institutions should come up with better project proposals on shark research. They have to also do projects on the community involvement in conservation of sharks. There will be provision for getting funds from UGC, ICAR, NFDB etc.
5. Dr. Maruthapandi and students have complemented the points given by Mr. Jain.
6. Mr. Jain also talked about the recent ban on shark fin export that the DGFT has instituted. He said that despite this ban, in the past 3 months, the export has almost doubled. Fishermen are selling their fin stocks at distress rates and traders are benefitting the most as they buy at low prices and sell at high value to buyers.
7. Mr. Yadava said that none of the state governments have called any meetings to discuss DGFT's ban. They have not called meeting with their traders, fishermen or even officers and no further recommendations are being sought by the state government on this matter. The governments of various coastal states have distanced themselves from each other and do not even discuss such matters. He emphasized that this needs lack of communication needed to be addressed.

Dr. Yadava said that state governments were not consulted at the time of issuing this ban and they should have been involved as fisheries are a state subject.

8. Mr. Srinivas brought up the point that research scholars themselves should be involved in data collection directly at harbours, since much of the shark catch is not monitored directly by the fisheries department.
9. Mr. Hariharan said that many fishermen are involved in quick offloading, marketing and concealed transportation of such fishing catch. Using cell phone technology, information on the catch and transport is passed onto buyers. However, most inspectors and researchers are unaware of such catches. If governments were to create mechanisms, such transported catches can be examined to see catch composition and any illegal fishing can be detected. Separate teams to monitor such activities should be created. Currently, the sampling done by inspectors gives inaccurate information, as it is not done properly. It varies up to 60-70% from actual data.
10. Dr. Yadava said that all data collection is the responsibility of the State Government. However, of late, the State Governments have moved into a welfare perspective and are not doing the original job they are mandated to do. Hence, priorities need to be clearly listed. Since Central Government has not demanded clear data, the State Government staff has become lax about their duties. The State has further emphasized CMFRI's role in data collection and as a result, states themselves are not collecting data. Hence, neither State Governments nor CMFRI have collected good data.

Dr. Yadava added that just as the MFRA can only be implemented by those authorities who are empowered under the MFRA, likewise data collection can't be done by research scholars as there

will be no method to monitor or ensure standards. They also can't be held responsible for accuracy of data. Thus, it must be done by an officer authorized by the central or state government directly.

11. Mr. Jain said that scientists must teach the fishermen how to identify locally seen sharks species in English and in their scientific names. He says that the lack of such knowledge is preventing the fishermen from collecting data in a form that can be used by the government or scientists.
12. Dr. Yadava said that IGOs across the world are focusing on getting log books filled up. He mentioned that the EU issues bans on accepting of data from nations if such log books are not filled up properly. Hence, in due course of time, India is also going to face strict action if log books are not maintained by its fishermen.
13. Mr. John Britto said that hunting animals in the forest is different than fishing at the sea. Fishing is for livelihood and it is the source of income for the fishermen. Hunting in the forest is targeting rare animals to get huge benefit for particular people. That is against the law and punishable under Wild life Act. But punishing the fishermen under the same law for fishing is not justifiable.
14. Advocate Jose Bilbin also complemented to the points raised by Mr. Britto. He said that fishing in the sea for livelihood by large number of people. But looting our rare animals by small group in the forest for their huge benefit. The government must understand the difference of fishing for livelihood and looting of animals for huge benefit.
15. Dr. Maruthapandi, expressed the need for a separate regulation for conservation of marine resources especiaaly for sharks.

C. Technical Sessions:

Dr.Y. S. Yadava, talked about the **Procedure for including species in the various schedules of the CITES and Wild Life Protection Act**

Mr. Jain made a presentation on **Automatic Shark Species Identification System** on behalf of Dr. priestly Shan, Principal, Royal College of Engineering, Trisur. It was about a classification system for real time operations rather than general biological classification methods. It will provide a clear and practical way to organize and communicate information. The participants expressed that they need some clarification that cant be answered by Mr. Jain. Hence they suggested to write to Dr. Shan for having more clarity of the presentation.

D. Recommendations:

After completion of all the sessions, the participants were asked to give pertinent suggestions/recommendations for the Mission to follow up on. These are as follows:

1. Encourage the regulation of hooks and line usage among all fishermen in India.
2. Demand for greater clarity in administrative regulations, especially with state fisheries departments.
3. Schemes for rehabilitating or providing alternative livelihoods for fishermen must be devised by Animal Welfare Board and NGOs
4. Fishermen must be involved in policy and decision making. Also, it is important to teach all fishermen communities how to properly identify the banned shark species.

5. Enforcement officials must be trained thoroughly to identify scheduled or protected species of sharks.
6. Fishermen must try to avoid catching baby or juvenile sharks
7. Hunting Wild Animals in the forest and fishing in the sea is different and replaces the Wildlife Protection Act in fisheries with suitable Act.
8. It would be ideal to get a separate act for shark conservation
9. Students with degrees in fisheries should be absorbed into jobs in the state and central government. Further, students who are undergoing their education in fisheries colleges across India should be exposed to such meetings on a regular basis so that they can understand practicalities of fisheries management.
10. Special courses on fisheries should be introduced in all college and senior school classes so that students are aware of this sector as well.

The meeting ended with the vote of thanks proposed by Advocate Jose Bilbin.