

13th April 2020

To,
Shri Giriraj Singh
Hon'ble Minister,
Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry & Dairying
E-mail: officeministerahdf@gmail.com

Subject: Welfare of India's fishers in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Respected Sir,

The lockdown issued in the interest of the nation to control the spread of COVID-19, while commendable, is having a significantly distressing impact on the most economically challenged and marginalised sections of our society. As institutions and individuals in support of social well-being, environmental justice, and the sustainable development of India's inland, coastal and marine systems, we would like to share our concerns regarding the impacts of the COVID-19 lockdown on India's fishing communities. While the problems faced by fishworkers in marine and inland capture fisheries may be similar to those faced by other marginalised sectors, our expertise is limited to the marine and inland fishing communities and thus we share our opinions with you in following 3 parts:

PART I: A summary of the current status of India's fishers and fish workers

PART II: The immediate government action required

PART III: Suggestions for rebuilding India's marine fishing sector

PART I: STATUS SUMMARY

Over the past few weeks several fisher organisations and civil society groups have reported the following impacts across India's coastal states and island territories:

1. Limited availability of cash reserves and or rations in fishing hamlets:

- 1.1. Fishing is the only source of daily income for many, and the sudden lockdown has made it difficult for communities to provide for themselves and their families, leaving their women, children and elderly especially vulnerable.
- 1.2. Unable to purchase medicines, emergency rations and basic supplies, and the inability to pay existing debts are leaving people extremely vulnerable to indebtedness and open to exploitation by money-lenders, and open to abuse by unscrupulous merchants.
- 1.3. Government rations are only being distributed in some coastal areas and unfortunately the quantity and quality is not standardised and often lacks essential items like oil or cooking fuel. Additionally we would like to flag that the fishing community diet is different from many groups and hence rations should be selected accordingly. For example, including chili and tamarind as part of the rations rather than dal and opening up subsistence fishing (at the bare minimum) so they can catch fish for their own consumption is required.

2. Stranded fishers:

- 2.1. Tens of thousands of migrant fish workers are stranded in various parts of the country and [abroad](#), with no money or means to get back home.
- 2.2. Most are forced to remain on their boats or in temporary migrant camps in crowded quarters with limited access to food, medicine, water and hygiene. The present condition is highly

counterproductive in the light of the COVID-19 spread, as they are unable to practice any physical distancing measures.

2.3. Far away and with no income to contribute, they are growing restless and afraid for the wellbeing of their families back home.

3. **Sudden & unplanned halt in seafood supply:**

3.1. Even though exempt from lockdown restrictions, escalating fears amongst the public and enforcement bodies has led to the closure of fisheries rather than creation of safeguards and measures to ensure productivity and seafood-based protein supply.

3.2. Limited awareness of coronavirus coupled with lack of sanitation, soap supplies and access to personal protective equipment (PPE) is raising fears amongst some fishers to go fishing.

3.3. Rising local demand and lack of fresh catch are resulting in the sale of [decayed or formalin-laced fish](#), both highly hazardous to public health, as reported from Kerala.

4. **Declining profits from declining demand:**

4.1. The COVID-19 pandemic began affecting seafood exports from India as early as January, driving down prices well before the lockdown.

4.2. The widespread myth that eating fish or meat would lead to catching COVID-19 has also led to poor domestic sales of seafood leaving fishers with little money to tide through the current lockdown period and the upcoming monsoon ban period.

4.3. Lack of seafood exports is also flooding the market with farm fishery products, posing a direct threat to the marine fishing sector.

5. **Mental health concerns:**

5.1. These livelihood and health related uncertainties are raising anxiety levels and threatening the mental and physical well-being of these individuals and those involved in relief efforts (government, NGO and civil society members).

PART II: IMMEDIATE CALL TO ACTION

We thank the Indian government for acknowledging the plight of India's 1.6 crore fishers, fish workers, and fish vendors during these difficult times by officially exempting restrictions on movement of fish and seafood products, for classifying fish and seafood as essential commodities and offering financial assistance to the fishing community ([MFAHD D.O. No. 12035/1/2016-Fy\(WU\)](#) dated 24th March 2020, [D.O. No. 12035/1/2015-Fy\(WU\)](#) dated [26th March 2020](#) and [30th March 2020](#)). However, as highlighted earlier, in many parts of coastal India these orders are yet to be implemented. In India, some state governments have halted fishing completely and the impacts on fishers' livelihoods mentioned under Part I continues. We find that the recent order issued by MHA ([No. 40-3/2020-DM-I\(A\)](#)) dated 10th April 2020) that exempts operations of marine fishing / aquaculture industries from the lockdown, while a welcome development does not negate the suffering that has already been caused. It continues to exclude inland fishing and without clear directives from MFAHD and state fisheries departments in regards to social distancing and proper hygiene, capture fisheries (both inland and marine) remain in limbo. In particular, within India's diverse fishing communities, the most marginalised and impacted are the small-scale fishers (SSF) and fishworkers involved in the allied activities. In light of the current lockdown, steadily declining markets and upcoming monsoon bans, we have the following recommendations for government relief to fishing communities across India, but with special attention to the condition of the SSF and the poorest among fishworkers:

1. **Disaster Relief:**

a. State governments must facilitate immediate partnerships with NGOs, fishworker associations and unions, and other civil society organisations to provide and maintain an adequate and transparent supply of rations, drinking water, cooking fuel to fishers across India.

- b. Medical needs and sanitation also need to be addressed so as to maintain the health of these communities living in high density settlements.
 - c. Having no income in the last 3 weeks, a relief package that involves a proportion of monetary assistance is also required to supplement government rations.
2. **Migrant fishworkers:**
- a. In addition to the monetary compensation, for the many thousand fish workers stranded in various parts of the country and abroad, we request that local administration be directed to ensure that basic needs in regards to food, accommodation, medical care and sanitation be addressed and constantly re-evaluated, and that their families in their home villages are provided for. This includes migrant workers working in fish processing and cold storage industries whose conditions need attention. A transparent documented process should be established in this regard.
 - b. We ask that local administrations of the coastal states arrange transport back to home for these migrants (as soon as the lockdown is lifted) and coordinate with home states to provide healthcare for preventative measures once they reach their homes, including health screening and isolation facilities.
The exemplary action taken by Andhra Pradesh government to safely transport 1400 fishworkers from Karnataka to their homes in Andhra Pradesh, where they were locally quarantined, can serve as a model to other states facing similar troubles. The order from the District Collector of Chittoor, Karnataka referencing the Andhra government order is provided in Annexure 01
3. **Financial Aid:**
- a. We demand that the initial decision to provide fisher welfare only to Aadhaar linked bank accounts be revised. Many unions have reported that workers in the supply chain (ice plants, processing etc) as well as women vendors do not have Aadhar linked bank accounts. Hence we request the administration, especially the fisheries departments, to work with the fisher co-operative societies, fisher allied sector associations such as ice factors, auctioneer associations and unions in the district to identify fishworkers of the district that do not have Aadhar linked bank accounts and ensure that the relief packages reach them as well.
 - b. Fishers, fish workers, vendors and all those involved in the supply chain, women in particular, should be treated as a special economic group and financial packages that can support them for the duration of the lockdown and into the monsoon ban (a minimum of 3 months) be offered. This package is not a replacement for the normal monsoon ban relief package which should be provided as usual for the ban period. Current relief packages of Rs 1000 offered by certain state governments are insufficient and we request that the INR 10,000 package requested by the NFF be issued.
 - c. Women fishworkers need to be given special preference in financial assistance as they constitute a large proportion of fishers but are economically vulnerable actors in marine fisheries
 - d. As the lockdown evolves, and restrictions ease up, there still may be certain areas where safety concerns translate into restricted fishing (weather or disease related). In such instances, fishers must have the option to obtain compensation from the fisheries department, particularly in areas that are emerging as hotspots or areas of health concern.

PART III: REBUILDING INDIA'S MARINE FISHING SECTOR

1. **Public health & safety:**
- a. The fishing community is currently plagued with misinformation on COVID-19. NGOs like ourselves require government support in sharing accurate information and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) with these communities.
 - b. Government endorsement is required to revive fisheries and consumer trust. National and state level fisheries authorities should put clear statements of fish and other seafood products not being carriers of the coronavirus to help dissipate myths.

2. Continuing marine capture fisheries:

- a. In conjunction with the [10th April 2020 MHA order](#), we encourage state and district governments **to prioritize the re-opening of small-scale fisheries (SSF)**. SSF in territorial waters can help meet the food security needs of their own families, hamlets supply and local coastal communities with safe and healthy seafood.
- b. While large-scale mechanised fishing operations may not be able to comply with COVID-safe norms, without more active engagement from the state, we find that current lack of fish landings to be a significant threat to the health and well-being of coastal communities accustomed to this protein source.
- c. Small-Scale Fishers (SSF), including traditional motorised and non-motorised boats, can easily comply with our government's precautionary health and safety measures, including social distancing as they tend to involve fewer people (2-3 per boat), often land on beaches rather than crowded jetties, support a lower catch volume and consumer base. We request the government to actively assist the sector in setting up markets and supply chains to implement the same.
- d. With a little support, small-scale fisheries can further reduce public interaction by conducting fish sales over the phone as well as practicing door-to-door delivery. Women fish vendors can be empowered to utilize new modes of sale and distribution that maintain physical distance. Ice factories and refrigeration facilities should also be opened up, albeit at lower capacities, to support SSF.
- e. Fish auctions controlled by [state cooperative societies](#) that help ensure fishers viable prices irrespective of market fluctuations in supply and demand are essential in reviving the fish economy.
Examples of this successfully being executed are coming in from [Kerala](#) and [Maharashtra](#).

We hope you will take timely action with regards to our opinions and suggestions, and we thank you for your time and consideration. We would be happy to engage further with the Indian government in rebuilding India's fisheries and to provide more information on the issues highlighted here.

CC:

Shri Amit Shah, Hon'ble Minister for Home Affairs
Shri Santosh Kumar Gangwar, Hon'ble Minister of State for Labour and Employment
CMs of all coastal states of India.
Members of Parliament of all coastal states of India.

Sincerely,

On behalf of the following institutions and individuals:

1. Mahima Jaini, Marine Biologist, New Delhi
2. Marianne Manuel, Dakshin Foundation
3. Swathi Seshadri, Researcher, Bangalore
4. Chetan Rao, Dakshin Foundation
5. Muralidharan Manoharakrishnan, Dakshin Foundation
6. Jones Thomas Spartegus, Doctoral Research Scholar, Thoothukudi, India
7. Amalendu Jyotishi, Professor, Azim Premji University
8. Joeri Scholtens, Asst. Professor, University of Amsterdam
9. Adam Jadhav, PhD fellow, University of California at Berkeley
10. Sahir Advani, Junior Adjunct Fellow, Dakshin Foundation
11. Maarten Bavinck, Professor, University of Amsterdam, Netherlands

12. Ajantha Subramanian, Professor, Harvard University
13. Prateep Kumar Nayak, University of Waterloo, Canada
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17. Venkatesh Salagrama, Consultant, Kakinada
18. Ajit Menon, Professor, Madras Institute of Development Studies, Chennai
19. Trisha Gupta, Dakshin Foundation
20. Vinod Malayiethu, Team Leader, Marine Programmes, WWF-India
21. Shawn Dsouza, Research Assistant, Dakshin Foundation
22. Simron Singh, University of Waterloo, Canada
23. Arjilli Dasu, DFYWA, Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh
24. Nitya Rao, Professor, University of East Anglia, UK
25. Lyla Mehta, Professor, Institute of Development Studies, UK
26. Nityanand Jayaraman, Chennai Solidarity Group, Chennai
27. Sharadha Shankar, Save Chennai Beaches Campaign, Chennai
28. K. Saravanan, Coastal Resource Centre, Chennai
29. Rosemary Viswanath, Bangalore
30. Anil Tharayath Varghese, Delhi Forum, New Delhi
31. Naveen Namboothri, Dakshin Foundation
32. Kanishk Srinivasan, Dakshin Foundation
33. Sarmistha Pattanaik, Associate Professor, IIT Bombay
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37. Anish K K, PhD Candidate, Mumbai
38. Mangaraj Panda, United Artists Association, Odisha
39. Vardhan Patankar, Marine Biologist, Mumbai.
40. Abhishek Jamalabad, marine biologist, Goa
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44. Zoya Tyabji, Marine Biologist, Mumbai
45. Götz Hoeppe, Associate Professor, University of Waterloo, Canada
46. Fwshali Basumatary, Doctoral Research Scholar, TISS, Mumbai.
47. D. Balasubramanian, French Institute of Pondicherry, India
48. Debabrata Patra, Regional Manager, Action Aid, Bhubaneswar
49. Sisir Kanta Pradhan, Doctoral Research Scholar, University of Waterloo, Canada
50. Jenny S, Senior Researcher, Centre for Equity Studies, Delhi
51. Senthil Babu, French Institute of Pondicherry
52. Aparna Sundar, University of Toronto, Canada
53. Ramachandra Bhatta, Formerly: Professor of Fisheries Economics, College of Fisheries, Mangalore
54. John Kurien, Visiting Professor, Azim Premji University, Bengaluru
55. Lalitha Kamath, Associate Professor, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai
56. Jyothis Sathyapalan, Professor, National Institute of Rural development Hyderabad INDIA
57. Dipani Sutaria, Ecologist, Ahmedabad, Gujarat, India
58. K.Murthy, State Convener, Right to Education Forum, Tamilnadu
59. Debabrata, Regional Manager, Action Aid, Bhubaneswar
60. Jesu Rethinam, Convenor, Coastal Action Network
61. Palsami, President, Ramnad District Fishworkers Union

62. Dr. P. Bala Murugan, member, Tamil Nadu Alliance
63. Ms. Vedavalli, President, Karaikal District Fisherwomen Federation
64. Dr Jenia Mukherjee, Assistant Professor, IIT Kharagpur
65. Dr Manish Chandi, retired researcher ANET
66. Nupur Kale, Biologist, Pune
67. Roshni Mangar, Project Seahorse, University of British Columbia, Canada
68. David Samuel Cheplick, Clemson University, South Carolina
69. Johny Stephen, Department of Environment and Geography, University of Manitoba, Canada
70. Alissa Barnes, Marine and Fisheries Biologist, Mumbai, Maharashtra, India
71. Sarah Ghorpade, PhD Student, University of Waterloo, Canada
72. Tanvi Vaidyanathan, PhD Candidate, The University of British Columbia, Canada
73. Dr Coralie D'Lima, Senior Programme Coordinator, Marine Programme, WWF-India
74. Siddharth Chakravarty, The Research Collective, Delhi.
75. Jatin Desai, Journalist, Mumbai
76. Mujahid Nafees, Ahmedabad, Gujarat
77. Usman Gani Sherasia, Secretary, National Fishworkers Forum
78. Dr. Kumaravelu, General Secretary, Vangakkadal Meen Thozhilalar Sangam, Nagapattinam
79. Gopal Dubey, New Mumbai, Maharashtra
80. TRRM, Ramnad
81. Savita Vijayakumar, The Research Collective
82. Soumen Ray, National Coordinator, National Platform for Small Scale Fish Workers (Inland)
83. Valarmathi, Treasurer, Tamilnadu Women Fishworkers Sangam
84. S.Nagavalli, Secretary, Bharathi Meeava Pengal Iyakkam, Pudukkottai
85. Aathanpan, Secretary, Pudukkottai Unorganised Workers Forum, Pudukkottai
86. M.Krishnamoorthy, Unorganized Workers Federation, Thoothukudi, Tamilnadu
87. Milan Das , General Secretary, Dakshinbanga Matsyajibi Forum , Kolkata
88. Ishaan Khot, Junior Programme Officer, Dakshin Foundation
89. Virgil D Sami, Arunodhaya, Chennai
90. Mahaboob Khan CP, Senior Research Assistant, Dakshin Foundation
91. Ajith Raj R, Research Assistant, Dakshin Foundation
92. Prerana Gawde, Research Assistant, Dakshin Foundation
93. S. Samundeeswari, Secretary, Coastal Women Federation
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95. Abhilasha Sharma, Research Assistant, Dakshin Foundation
96. Meera Anna Oommen, Dakshin Foundation
97. Kartik Shanker, Associate Professor, Indian Institute of Science Bangalore.
98. Nayana Udayashankar, Researcher, Bangalore
99. Stella James, Researcher, Bangalore
100. Shweta Wagh, Associate Professor, Kamla Raheja Vidyanidhi Institute of Architecture (KRVIA)
101. Hussain Indorewala, Urban Researcher, Mumbai.
102. Madhuri Mondal, Senior Research Assistant, Dakshin Foundation
103. Chandana Pusapati, Research Assistant, Dakshin Foundation
104. Hariprasath R, Research Assistant, Dakshin Foundation
105. Fausiya C K, Senior Project Assistant, Dakshin Foundation
106. Shalini Das, Project Assistant, Dakshin Foundation
107. Tara Lawrence, PhD Candidate, UiT - The Arctic University of Norway
108. Ema Fatima, Marine Conservation Professional, New Delhi
109. Benny Kuruvilla, Researcher, New Delhi
110. Debi Goenka, Executive Trustee, Conservation Action Trust

111. Tanmay Wagh, Project Assistant, Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru
112. Vineetha Venugopal, Senior Research Assistant, Dakshin Foundation
113. R. Sridhar, Researcher, Nagapattinam, Tamil Nadu
114. Parth Bapat, Mumbai
115. Kurumpanai Berlin, Kanyakumari District Secretary, Neythal Makkal Iyyakam
116. Alphonsa Jojan, Independent legal researcher, Kozhikode

Annexure 01

390

Revenue Department

From
Dr.N.Bharath Gupta,L.A.S.,
District Collector,
Chittoor

To
The Regional Manager,
APSRTC, Tirupati.

Roe:D1/285867/2020,Di: 29/03/2020.

sir

Sub:- Public Health - COVID-19 - Chittoor District - Transport of People coming from Kolar, Karanataka state to their destinations in Andhra Pradesh on 29.03.2020- Request for Providing Buses from Today Evening - Reg.

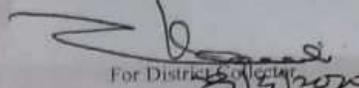
I am to inform you that nearly 1400 labours working in Mangalore, and other surrounding areas of Karanataka State are detained at the relief camps arranged at Kolar town of Karanataka State. As per the instructions of the Government of Andhra Pradesh, they have to be transported from Kolar to their native Assembly Constituency head quarters in the Districts of SPS Nellore, Prakasam, East Godavari, Srikakulam, Visakhapatnam, Guntur etc.,. The Tahsildar Palamaneru (9491077076) and Tahsildar, Gangavaram (9491077088) are already instructed to visit Kolar and segregate the labour Constituency wise and keep the lists (Names, Addresses and Mobile Numbers) and ensure proper boarding of labour in their allotted buses

I therefore request you to provide **48** No.of buses as detailed below

Sl.No	Name Of the District	Names of the Districts	Number	No.of Buses Required
1	Nellore	Nellore	676	23
2	Ongole	Ongole	263	09
3	Srikakulam	Srikakulam	231	08
4	Visakhapatnam	Visakhapatnam	113	04
5	Vizianagaram	Vizianagaram	08	
6	Orissa State	Orissa State	24	01
07	Kakinada	Kakinada	01	
08	Guntur	Guntur	18	01
	Reserver			02

The Buses Should report at kolar before the Tahsildar,Palamaneru (Contact.No. 9491077076) and Tahsildar, Gangavaram (Contact.No, 9491077088) at **06.00 Pm on 29.03.2020 (TODAY)**.The Tahsildars of Palamaneru and Gangavaram are requested to take immediate action

Yours faithfully,


For District Collector
Chittoor
29/3/2020

Copy to the Tahsildars, Palamaneru / Gangavaram.
Copy to the Depot Manager, APSRTC, Palamaneru
Copy to the Deputy Superintendent of Police, Palamaneru,
Copy to the Sub Collector, Madanapalle,
Copy to the Divisional Manager,APSRTC,Chittoor,
Copy to the Superintendent of Police, Chittoor for information,