



NATIONAL FEDERATION OF SMALL-SCALE FISHERWORKERS

Memo No. NFSF/President - 36/25

November 5, 2025

Dr. Abhilaksh Likhi,
Secretary,
Department of Fisheries, Government of India,
Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry & Dairying.

Sub: Observations and Suggestions regarding Marine Fisheries Census 2025.

Sir,

Greetings from the National Federation of Small-Scale Fishworkers (NFSF), the largest federation of small-scale fish workers in India.

We are given to understand that the fifth National Marine Fisheries Census 2025 (MFC 2025) will be jointly conducted by the Department of Fisheries (DoF), Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying, and the ICAR-Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI). Though we have got no official intimation or invitation to share our observations and suggestions regarding Marine Fisheries Census 2025, we deem it our duty to do so in the interest of our country and of the Indian marine fisheries sector in particular.

observations and suggestions of the National Federation of Small-Scale Fishworkers (NFSF) are as in the following –

1. Definitions: It is suggested that the definitions used in the census are reflective of the actually existing conditions in the fishing sector and are used more specifically to ensure that they are able to capture the diversity and dynamic nature of the fishery. Some indications of this are below:

- There are terms used in the census that are not always represented in the definitions. For example, in MFC-2016, there is no definition of 'active fishermen' but census data uses this in the presentation of data. On the other hand, definitions are not always represented in census data. For example, vessel ownership by fisherfolk does not mention if ownership is by part-time or full-time by which category of fishers. Similarly, absentee vessel owner-operators might be engaged full-time in the fishing sector, but they are not involved in fishing activities. Thus, categories of vessel owners should be introduced, including the indication of their participation in the marine fishing sector.

- The distinction between motorised and mechanised vessels is no longer clear; many motorised vessels now have small hydraulic or electric winches to haul fishing nets. It is suggested that engine HP be included in fisheries census along with an indication of labour-reducing devices in motorised vessels as a way to understand the spectrum of vessel types and gear combinations being deployed. Likewise, an indication of the length of the fishing trip, average fishing days per year are important to capture to understand engagement in fishing.

- Some definitions seem arbitrary. For example, full-time work is considered as those working more than 90% of the annual time in fishing, while anyone below is part-time. A more suited definition might be based on household income from and outside of fishing as a way to understand the livelihood opportunities that are offered to the fishers from within and/or outside the fishing



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sector. Related to this point, it will be important to capture what professions are being undertaken by fishers in part-time work. Given the decline in availability of fish for small-scale fishers, this information is relevant to understand occupational engagement and income levels within the sector.

- The definition of 'Marine Fishermen' includes man/woman/LGBTQ. It should be reworded to 'Marine Fisher' and should be any person (man/woman/transgender) who is engaged in marine fishing.

2. Village/Block level data: Census of the data is provided only at the regional state level. However, there is large variation within states and it is suggested that the information on census is provided at village or block level. Access to information related to housing, population, craft ownership, education, potable water, full/part-time engagement, gender dimensions are very important for those working directly in the fishing sector, such as organisations of fishers, are better able to capture the understanding and socio-economic profile of fishers.

3. Craft/Gear ownership: Previous to 2016, data on part ownership of fishing crafts was included. This should be re-introduced, including who the other partner in fishing vessels is. This helps in understanding relations of operations and ownership patterns against different vessel and gear combinations and was a part of the MFC-2010. It is also important that an indication of vessel ownership is provided along the lines of if the vessel owner is actively involved in fishing operations and if they are from the fishing community or not. With new investments in the marine fishing sector, it is important to understand how investments and ownership are shaping the outcome of government schemes, who is able to benefit from the schemes, and what is the trajectory of development.

4. Caste and tribe data: In the MFC-2016, data is captured on religion (Hinduism/Islam/Christianity/Others) and SC/ST data is clubbed. It is suggested that in line with the national caste census, caste data of fishers is included. Similarly, SC and ST data should be presented separately, and inclusion of DNT should be made. This will allow for better targeting of welfare schemes along the lines of SC-ST sub-plans, as well as assist in understanding the fishing castes engaged in fishing operations.

5. Household level data: The MFC-16 captures data related to household data: this includes housing status, average family size, sex ratio, educational status of fishers. It is suggested that this data be expanded to include: land and craft ownership, enumeration of gender wise children in the household, gender wise access to education of children at household level, access to welfare schemes (health, accident insurance, KCC) and in fisheries schemes (PMMSY/other regional schemes).

6. Part-time work: Other than addressing the definition of full-time and part-time work indicated earlier, it is important that the different types of part-time work that fishers are engaging in are enumerated. This should include the part-time work done in fishing and the part-time work done outside of fishing, including description of work, income levels, relations of work etc. It is also important to include the level/share of household income that is achieved through fishing and that from non-fishing activities.

7. Allied activities: While the MFC-16 includes data related to fishing and allied activities along gender lines, certain descriptions can be more specific. For example, where does the allied work 'peeling' entail? Or which sector do the 'labourers' from the fishing community work? Enumerating



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these categories of allied work will be important. Currently, the MFC only captures work of fishing community members, but it does not capture data on migrant workers who work in fishing through circular migration patterns in both fishing and allied activities. It is extremely important that work in fishing and allied activities through migration is captured in census data. This might be through coastal marine fishers migrating from east to west coasts (e.g., West Bengal to Kerala) or from north to south coasts (e.g., Andhra Pradesh to Tamil Nadu), or from non-marine fishing communities (e.g., from UP, Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, other tribal regions).

8. Fishery-related infrastructure: The information included in the MFC-16 primarily relates to fish processing centres for mechanised vessels. Other than beach landing centres for small-scale fishers, fish drying units, fish curing units, fish auction centres, fish repair centres are crucial fishery infrastructure. The enumeration of these is crucial and should be provided.

9. Gender and fish consumption: One of the most important attributes of fisherwomen is their reproductive labour in the fishing household. It is important to enumerate the nature of domestic work that women undertake within the household, in addition to productive work in fishing/outside the household. In addition, availability of fish for household consumption along gendered lines should be mapped so as to capture status of nutritional security of marine fishers.

We in NFSF sincerely hope that the above concerns will be considered in the census work.

Sincerely,

Pradip Chatterjee,
President,
NFSF

Copy forwarded for information and necessary action to –

The Director,
Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute,
Kochi.