



NATIONAL PLATFORM FOR SMALL SCALE FISHWORKERS

October 27, 2020

Shri Pinarai Vijayan,
Hon'ble Chief Minister,
Government of Kerala.

Sub: Small scale and traditional fish workers are opposed to the
“The Kerala Fish Auction, Marketing, and Quality Control Bill 2020”

Respected Sir,

Greetings from National Platform for Small Scale Fish Workers (NPSSFW), the largest platform of small scale fish workers having member organisations from 19 states of the country.

We are given to understand that the Government of Kerala has accorded cabinet approval to “The Kerala Fish Auction, Marketing, and Quality Control Bill 2020” to regularise “The Kerala Fish Auctioning, Marketing and Maintenance of Quality Ordinance, 2020” promulgated in September 2020. It is further informed that the said bill will be placed in the next session of the Kerala assembly. The ordinance and the bill have serious and far reaching impact on the life and livelihood of the small scale and traditional fishing communities.

The small scale and traditional fishing communities of Kerala are opposed to both the Ordinance and the Bill for the following main reasons –

- A. It is regretted that the Government of Kerala had issued the ordinance and has now accorded cabinet approval to the Bill without any consultation with the small scale and traditional fish workers or their organisations in Kerala. NPSSFW opposes any move by the Government to take decisions affecting the life and livelihood of small scale fishing communities without consulting them and taking their informed consent.
- B. It is further regretted that the Government of Kerala in issuing the Ordinance and approving the Bill intends to restrict auction of fish to a few harbours only. According to official data Kerala coast has 222 traditional fishing villages and 189 fish landing centres. Local auctions take place at the fish landing centres. Restricting auction of fish to a few harbours will make it both difficult and costly for the fishing communities to take their fish to designated harbours for auction. The Government, instead of enhancing the access of fishers to the market is reducing and restricting it. The small and traditional fishing communities are not going to accept this. The small scale fishers would have been really served if the Government could provide a transparent mechanism that would protect them from being cheated at the fish landing centre auctions, instead of making them dependent on a few harbour based auctioneers.
- C. It is alarming to know that the Government of Kerala proposes to handover the management of the auction to concerned Harbour Management Committee which will be



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dominated by political party representatives. The role of coastal village based small scale fishers will be minimal and remote in controlling matters related to auction of fish harvested by them.

- D. It is shocking to witness that women fish vendors are not allowed to enter into the harbours to take part in the auction. It is not only damaging to the livelihood of women fish vendors who are the great majority of fish retailers in Kerala, but also is gender discriminatory. NPSSFW vehemently opposes it.
- E. It is also disturbing to know that besides the fees already being paid to the state government by the fishing community, an extra 5% from their earnings is proposed to go to the auction team, fishermen co-operative society, local bodies, fish landing centres and management committees. This is a tax forced on poor fishers. The Government first stopped free auctioning and compelled the fishers to sell their harvest through a few designated auction centres. Then imposed a tax on them for auctioning.
- F. It is reported that the Bill allows only members of FISHCOFED affiliated fisher societies to take part in the auction and permits will be issued to this effect. So the right of the common fisher to sell fish harvested by him or her has been infringed.
- G. The centralisation of fish auction with the licence and permit regime is going to unleash a new height of corruption coupled with political favouritism. Common fishers and fish vendors will be the worst sufferer. It has already been witnessed that some unscrupulous people are selling fish at much higher price to retailer right at the harbour by paying commission to the authorities. There is little doubt that the political party leaders will appoint their team in the HMC with the aim to make money.

In view of the above, we would request you to stop enactment of “The Kerala Fish Auction, Marketing, and Quality Control Bill 2020” and start a process of consultation with the small scale fish workers and their organisations to evolve a system of transparent and just fish auctioning system with quality maintenance of fresh fish.

Thanking you.

Yours faithfully,

Pradip Chatterjee
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