Do's and Don'ts During Fishing Ban Period for Livelihood & Fisheries

Chandan Roul, Arpit Acharya*, Nityananda Das, Sushanta Kumar Patra, Brundaban Sahu, Manoj Kumar Tripathy and Dharitri Choudhury

College of Fisheries, O.U.A.T., Rangeilunda, Berhampur-07

Corresponding Author
Arpit Acharya
Email: acharya.arpit18@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

The seasonal ban on marine fishing on the Indian coast is one of the key management measures to conserve and protect the marine resources during the most vulnerable phase of fish reproduction and breeding. The ban is enforced on the fishing activity in the sea for certain months of the year during April-June on the eastern coast and June-July on the western coast and contributes to the sustainability of fish population and fishers' livelihood. They can protect juvenile fish populations until they are large enough to be harvested and provide a pause to allow sensitive coastal marine habitats such as coral reefs, mangrove forests, and estuarine nursery areas to recover from fishing pressure. During the fishing closure, coastal fishers may be encouraged to spend time on other income-generating opportunities that could offer more secure livelihoods. Routine maintenance of fishing boats, repairs, servicing of engines and upgrading of life-saving equipment are common activities. Many fishers are engaged in capacity-building and training programs organized by government agencies, cooperatives, or marine research centre. Other sources of income include aquaculture, seaweed farms, crab fattening, fish processing and small-scale homebased microenterprises to maintain family income during an annual ban. This would be complemented by social security schemes, insurance renewal and availing state welfare packages for socio-economic stability. The conditions attaching to the seasonal ban must as well be respected if the ban is to be effective. Operating mechanized or motorized boats,

using destructive gears such as bottom trawling and light nets, as well as catching juveniles and brood stock, are some of the restrictions imposed during the fishing ban. Moreover, illegal harvesting, trading, catching of fish, damaging spawning grounds, and water pollution are some of the activities that threaten marine life and, henceforth, the local fishing community's livelihood. Consequently, the fishing ban during seasons is beneficial for coastal communities in India.

INTRODUCTION:

Sustainable management of fishery resources is vital for future generations and ensuring food security, both in terms of ecology and livelihood for millions of people. Fisheries management encompasses fisheries and the range of human activities connected to taking, processing, and marketing fish, as well as the variety of stakeholders involved, from traditional and mechanized fishers, traders, and fish workers handling processing and marketing, and a range of other supporting industries. Additionally, fish and other marine life inhabit various aquatic habitats that comprise interconnected ecosystems that sustain them and are influenced by natural and human factors (Vivekanandan *et al*., 2010).

In recent years, fisheries management in India has been confronted by numerous conflicts and challenges. They have been triggered by the need to manage scarce resources while balancing the interests of different societal groups that vary in levels of organization and technology. India needs fisheries that focus on sustainable management of its fisheries resources, conserve fish stocks, and appropriate technologies that enhance productivity, ensure food security, and at the same time promote livelihood security for the coastal population (Srinath & Pillai, 2008).

India's fisheries management started with the enactment of the Indian Fisheries Act of 1897 and continued with the Marine Fisheries Regulation Act (MFRA) of 1978, which was drafted by the coastal states for managing fisheries resources within territorial waters. The latter covers waters within the state's jurisdiction, up to 12 nautical miles from the coast. Furthermore, in 1977, India announced its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), which extended up to 200 nautical miles from the coast, giving the country sovereign rights over all maritime resources. Though the central government makes policies for all fisheries beyond the territorial waters, the coastal states regulate fisheries within their 12 nautical mile waters and, as a result, have policies for sustainable resource management. Most of these policies take the form of rules and regulations aimed at managing fisheries to prevent destructive and unsustainable fishing practices. Some of the policies include the prohibition of specified fishing gears, explosives, and poison, regulation of numbers and types of fishing crafts, mesh size regulations, minimum size regulations of fish catch, protection of threatened species, and designation of marine protected areas.

The Seasonal Fishing Ban or SFB is the most common management measure used in fisheries management in India. Most other states use it, unlike other rules and regulations mentioned above, which are only used in some states. The duration of the ban varies between 45 and 75 days depending on the state. Historically, states implemented different schedules, but uniformity was introduced after the intervention of Department of Fisheries, Government of India, 2020. At present:

- West Coast: Ban period from 1 June to 31 July
- East Coast: Ban period from 15 April to 14 June

Kerala pioneered the implementation of the fishing ban in 1988, followed by Goa, Karnataka, and Maharashtra. By 2000, all maritime states had adopted the measure. States like Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Goa enforce a complete shutdown of all vessels during the ban period, whereas others allow traditional craft or motorized boats with limited horse-power (Vivekanandan *et al*., 2010).

State-Wise Variation in Regulations:

- Gujarat (1998–99): A 67-day complete prohibition on all fishing craft from 10 June to 15 August.
- Maharashtra (1990): Fully restricts all fishing craft for 67 days within the same window.
- Kerala (1988): Implements a 47-day closure from 15 June to 31 July, allowing only traditional and low-powered motorized craft (less than 10hp).
- Tamil Nadu and Puducherry (2001): Ban applies only to mechanized craft from 15 April to 31 May, exempting non-motorized and small motorized vessels.
- Odisha (2000): Enforces a 60-day ban with restrictions for trawlers and high-powered motorized craft.

According to Global Context of Seasonal Bans many countries across continents enforce seasonal closures, especially for shrimp fisheries. Examples include:

- Kenya: 4-month closure from November to March
- Madagascar and Mozambique: 3-month closure
- Bahrain: 1 March to 31 July (5 months)
- Saudi Arabia: August to January (4 months)
- New Zealand: 9.5-month closed season for shrimp
- Brazil: Around 3 months
- Texas, USA: 45-day closure

In some places, like Indonesia, trawling itself was banned entirely for almost three decades.

What to Do during Fishing Ban

The seasonal fishing ban (SFB) provides an important opportunity for coastal fishers to pause their marine operations and focus on activities that strengthen their livelihood security, enhance fishing efficiency, and contribute to the resilience of coastal communities. Although the ban temporarily restricts fishing, the period can be productively utilized in several meaningful ways that support both ecological sustainability and household welfare (Colwell & Axelrod, 2017; Ramasubramanian *et al*., 2021).

1. **Maintenance and Upgradation of Fishing Assets**

One of the most important activities during the fishing ban period is the maintenance and repair of fishing gear. Fishers use the fishing ban period to engage in a variety of activities such as:

a. Repairing and/or replacing old nets so as to reduce wastage and also to ensure good quality harvest during the fishing season.

b. Servicing diesel engines, cooling systems, oil filters, and other equipment malfunctions that may have occurred during the fishing activity.

c. Repainting old wooden or fiberglass boats to prevent damage to the boat caused by seawater.

d. Upgrading fishing boat accessories such as GPS, life jackets, life buoys, distress flares, and other communication equipment.

The above maintenance activity is very advantageous to the fishers since it helps them have a good fishing season. For instance, fishing boat owners in states such as Kerala and Tamil Nadu use the fishing ban period to undertake major servicing of their boats' engines, which could not be possible if they engaged in fishing activities throughout the year.

2. Participation in Training and Skill Development Programs

The downtime also allows fishers to improve their knowledge and technical skills. Various government departments, fisheries universities, ICAR institutes, and NGOs conduct free or subsidized training on:

- Marine safety and first aid
- Modern navigation systems
- Weather forecasting and cyclone preparedness
- Hygienic fish handling and processing
- Seaweed cultivation and shellfish aquaculture
- Value addition techniques such as drying, pickling, smoking, or packaging

Such training enhances long-term earning capacity. For instance, coastal SHGs in Odisha have shifted to crab fattening after receiving short-term training during SFB, significantly increasing their income (Ramasubramanian *et al*., 2021).

3. Seasonal Alternative Livelihoods

Because income from fishing stops during the ban, diversifying livelihood sources becomes essential. Fishers can engage in activities such as:

- **Crab fattening:** Low investment and high returns within 20–30 days.
- **Fish processing and value addition:** Preparation of dried fish, pickles, and smoked products
- **Brackish water and freshwater aquaculture:** Rearing carp, tilapia, or vannamei shrimp in ponds & aquaculture feed production.
- **Seaweed collection and cultivation:** Especially popular in Tamil Nadu's Palk Bay.
- **Small-scale retailing:** Grocery shops, ice-selling units, and mechanical repair services.
- **Tourism-related work:** Boat rides, guiding, or homestay activities in coastal tourist areas.
- Maintenance of fishing harbours and landing centres.

These income sources provide immediate financial stability and reduce dependence on marine fishing (Colwell & Axelrod, 2017; Ramasubramanian *et al*., 2021).

4. Planning for the Upcoming Fishing Season

The ban period is also ideal for preparing for future fishing operations. Fishers often:

- Assess market trends such as demand for specific fish species.
- Estimate fuel, ice, and labour requirements.

- Evaluate fishing routes and potential fishing grounds.
- Plan crew arrangements for the next season.

For example, trawler associations in Gujarat conduct collective meetings during the SFB to plan fuel procurement strategies and coordinate fishing schedules to avoid overcrowding in specific zones.

5. Community-Based Activities and Environmental Conservation

Engaging in environmental protection helps maintain healthy ecosystems that support marine life. During the ban, fishers can:

- Participate in mangrove planting drives, which protect coastlines and provide nurseries for juvenile fish.
- Join beach clean-up campaigns to remove plastic and debris.
- Support awareness programmes on sustainable fishing.
- Help local agencies monitor protected zones such as coral patches and sea turtle nesting beaches.

Such activities foster strong community bonds and contribute to long-term ecological sustainability (Vivekanandan *et al*., 2010).

6. Making Use of Government Schemes and Institutional Support

Fishers should also take advantage of the ban period to comply with legal and administrative formalities. Some of the activities that fishers should engage in during this period include:

- Renewing fishing licences and other relevant documents.
- Taking up insurance claims on boats and other work equipment.
- Tapping into welfare schemes, for instance the Accrual Savings-cum-Relief Scheme.
- Joining co-operative societies to get access to credit facilities.

States such as Kerala and Goa offer free food kits or ration to fishers to help them supplement their needs. Fishers should also explore the opportunity to apply for various schemes, for instance those available under the PM Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY) (Department of Fisheries, Government of India, 2020).

What not to do during Fishing Ban

The Seasonal Fishing Ban (SFB) is among the most effective conservation measures that have been implemented successfully in recent years to promote sustainable livelihoods in fisheries. The ban period plays a critical role in protecting fish stocks while also supporting fishers' livelihoods. However, for the measures to be of any significance, it is paramount that fishers adhere to the regulations that support the objectives of the initiative. The following points highlight some of the key aspects that fishers should consider during the fishing ban period. Generally, the key reason why the fishing ban has been imposed is to allow fish to reproduce at least once before being caught. Consequently, the ban period spares spawning adults and allows for recruitment to take place before any fishing activities resume (Vivekanandan *et al*., 2010; Colwell *et al*., 2019).

1. Fishing Restrictions: Activities Fishers Must Strictly Avoid

Fishermen should not use mechanized or motorized boats during the ban period. This is because such vessels pose a significant threat to fish breeding grounds due to the high intensity of fishing efforts they represent. Activities such as trawling, purse seining, use of LED lights, and deep netting should also be

avoided as they are either destructive to breeding grounds or have a high catch rate (Department of Fisheries, Government of India, 2020).

Fishermen should also avoid using fishing nets with meshes that are too small. Using such nets leads to catching immature fish, resulting in reduced population numbers since they cannot contribute to the next stock of fish (Vivekanandan *et al*., 2010).

Violations such as selling or transporting fish caught in violation of the ban period should also be avoided. This is because such activities can lead to heavy penalties, including the confiscation of boats. Avoiding dealing with middlemen and those involved in facilitating illegal fishing activities is also important (Department of Fisheries, Government of India, 2020; Colwell *et al*., 2019).

Example

In Kerala and Goa, there are periodic raids by authorities on commercial vehicles suspected of transporting illegal catch such as shrimp or pelagic fish. Consequently, the fisherfolk community loses out on both income and reputation since the raids often result in the confiscation of the cargo.

2. Ecological Protection: What Fishers Should Not Disturb

The protection of breeding grounds and other key habitats is extremely crucial and should be the focus of all fishing communities. As such, fishers should avoid using the spawning grounds, shallow coral reefs, mangrove creeks, shellfish beds, and other breeding sites. These habitats provide ideal conditions for the early stages of various fisheries species and are, therefore, essential to sustainable fisheries. Activities such as throwing plastics and other waste materials in the sea or its vicinity should also be avoided at all costs. Such practices not only constitute pollution but can also lead to entanglement of aquatic animals, leading to injury or death (Vivekanandan *et al*., 2010).

Avoiding harvesting immature fish or those that are egg-buried or berried fish (egg-laden crabs) is also critical. Similarly, fishers should avoid catching berried females (those carrying eggs) of any species of fish and crustaceans. The prohibition of harvesting these catches is critical for fisheries sustainability as it allows fish stock numbers to replenish and maintain a reasonable level (Vivekanandan *et al*., 2010).

Furthermore, fishers should avoid interacting with illegal fishing operations and middlemen involved in facilitating such activities. It is critical that fishers not get involved in any illicit fishing activities such as night fishing and use of prohibited fishing gear. In addition, fishers should avoid facilitating or dealing with illegal fishing activities such as transport of fish caught during the fishing ban period.

3. Social Responsibilities: What Not to Ignore During SFB

During the SFB period, fishers should avoid encouraging or advocating for any illegal fishing activities. Instead, the focus should be on guiding and supporting others to understand how the ban is critical for fisheries sustainability and their livelihoods. The community should also focus on sensitizing their counterparts in other regions on the importance of the ban and dissuading them from participating in any illegal fishing activities. Furthermore, the involvement of community-based women's self-help groups in setting up income-generating activities such as processing dried fish and pickling should be encouraged. Such activities could provide alternative sources of income as well as support the fisherfolk community. Avoiding engagement in other businesses or other economic activities that do not contribute to the development of fisher welfare would also be appropriate (Colwell *et al*., 2017; Colwell *et al*., 2019).

Stake-holders views on Seasonal Fishing Ban

State	Preferred Ban Period / Duration	Key Concerns Raised	Major Suggestions & Demands
Andhra Pradesh	60 days (April–June), mainly for mechanised boats	Heavy fishing pressure; pollution from coastal chemical industries	Limit ban to mechanised vessels; improve cold storage & MSP; stop foreign vessels; promote open-sea cage culture; train youth through cooperatives
Tamil Nadu	Some want 45-day ban; others want shift to Nov–Dec	ID card issues at sea; poaching by Sri Lankan boats; gear conflicts (ring seine vs non-ring seine)	Financial aid (₹200/day or ₹9,000/45 days); compensate net losses; enforce 25 mm cod-end mesh; uniform ban across state; include mini-trawlers in ban; strict action on foreign boats
Kerala	Mixed views – mechanised sector wants ban removed; motorised/traditional want up to 90 days	Conflict over ban benefits; small-mesh gear depletion; foreign trawlers	Some request shifting ban to Dec–Jan; extend ban to 90 days; ban small-mesh nets; strict action against foreign vessels
Karnataka	Extend to 90 days (June 1–Aug 31)	Overfishing by multi-day trawlers; night fishing impact; juvenile catch by illegal gears	Ban for all except traditional crafts; regulate mesh size; ban night fishing; restrict multi-day trawlers; seize unregistered boats; ban harmful gears like stake nets; govt compensation & alternative livelihood support
Maharashtra	65 days (June 10–Aug 15) – acceptable to many; some want 90-day ban	Livelihood loss for some; uneven benefits across sectors	Govt relief for income loss; apply ban to all vessel types; 90-day ban preferred by 40%; mixed views on uniform national ban
Gujarat	Officials propose 9 June–9 Sept; fishers prefer existing schedule	Juvenile harvest; conflict between motorised & mechanised fleets	Ban sale of juvenile seer fish, pomfret, etc.; allow only hooks & line (not accepted by all); enforce cod-end mesh size; use fish finders to avoid juveniles; uniform west-coast ban
Odisha	Most agree with 61-day ban (April 15–June 14) for marine fisheries; some traditional fishers want shorter ban (45–50 days)	Reduced income during ban; limited alternative livelihood; lack of enforcement on trawlers; conflicts between mechanised trawlers & traditional boats; coastal erosion affecting fish habitats	Strict enforcement on trawlers; uniform ban across districts; financial assistance (₹200–₹300/day); compensation for cyclone-damaged boats; promote mud-crab fattening, seaweed, and cage culture; training for youth; strengthen fish landing centres; improve MSP for marine fish; regulate mesh size; curb illegal fishing by vessels from neighbouring states

Several government schemes support fishers during the ban

India's fisheries sector follows a nationwide seasonal fishing ban generally lasting 61 days to ensure that marine and inland fish stocks get adequate time to breed and rejuvenate. Since this period restricts fishing activities and affects income, both the Central Government and individual state governments have created financial support systems to help traditional fishers manage the loss of livelihood (Department of Fisheries, Government of India, 2020).

1. Central Support: Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY)

Under PMMSY, assistance is provided through a specially designed "Saving-cum-Relief" mechanism for economically vulnerable traditional fisher households. The idea behind this model is simple: fishers deposit a small amount during the active fishing season, and the government supplements it so that a meaningful relief package is available during the ban months (Department of Fisheries, Government of India, 2020).

How the Financial Structure Typically Works

- Total Assistance Provided: Around ₹4,500 per household annually (Department of Fisheries, Government of India, 2020).
- Fisher's Own Contribution: About ₹1,500, collected over nine months of fishing (roughly ₹160–₹170 per month) (Department of Fisheries, Government of India, 2020).
- Government Share: The Centre and State jointly add ₹3,000 to the fisher's savings (Department of Fisheries, Government of India, 2020).
- Disbursement Method: The accumulated amount is paid out during the ban period, usually in three installments of ₹1,500 each, giving families financial stability when fishing activities are halted (Department of Fisheries, Government of India, 2020).

This arrangement ensures that households have a predictable source of income when marine and inland fishing is temporarily stopped for ecological reasons (Department of Fisheries, Government of India, 2020).

2. State-Specific Relief Measures (Additional or Higher Assistance)

While PMMSY provides a national baseline, several coastal states have introduced their own assistance plans that offer much higher financial relief. These state schemes either complement PMMSY or function independently depending on local policies. For fishers residing in such states, the state-level benefits generally become the primary source of support during the ban period.

State	Scheme Name	Relief Amount (Approx.)
Tamil Nadu	Fishing Ban Relief Assistance	₹5,000 – ₹8,000 (depending on year & category)
Andhra Pradesh	YSR Matsyakara Bharosa	₹10,000 (given during the ban season)
Kerala	Matsya Board Saving-cum-Relief Scheme	₹4,500+ (linked to Kerala Fisheries Welfare Board)
Odisha	Livelihood Support (under PMMSY)	~₹4,500 (as per PMMSY norms)

CONCLUSION

The annual fishing ban is a key conservation measure that allows fish populations to regenerate, protects spawning periods, and supports the long-term health of both inland and coastal aquatic environments. For fishing households, following the suggested dos and don'ts during this restricted season is vital not only to support ecological balance but also to safeguard their own livelihoods. Making use of the ban period for constructive tasks such as overhauling nets and vessels, improving safety equipment, updating technical skills, exploring supplementary income sources, and utilizing government relief schemes can help fishers remain economically secure while promoting responsible fisheries management. At the same time, avoiding prohibited activities such as operating during the ban, using harmful fishing methods, capturing juvenile fish, or disturbing breeding and nursery areas is essential to ensure that the purpose of the ban is fulfilled and that resources remain available in the future. When fishers, officials, and local communities work together and comply with these measures, the ban season becomes a period of ecological renewal and social resilience, ultimately contributing to the sustainable development of fisheries and the well-being of the communities that depend on them.

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