2. Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) Certification

About 10 Indian marine and saline fish and shrimp varieties are set to get the global Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certification soon. The first batch is set to be submitted for the certification in 2026.

Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) - Overview

Nature and Establishment - The Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) is an international non-profit organization established in 1997 by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and Unilever. Headquartered in London, UK, it aims to promote sustainable fishing through science-based certification standards.

Mandate and Standards - MSC develops and manages globally recognized standards for -

1. Sustainable fishing practices (ensuring fish populations are maintained).
2. Ecosystem conservation (minimizing environmental impact).
3. Seafood traceability (ensuring certified products come from sustainable sources). The certification process involves third-party audits and continuous compliance monitoring.

Eco-Label Certification (Market-Based Approach) - The MSC eco-label serves as a voluntary, market-driven sustainability certification for wild-capture fisheries. It encourages responsible consumer choices and incentivizes fishers to adopt sustainable methods. Currently, about 20% of global fisheries are MSC-certified, showing growing global acceptance.

Significance of MSC Certification - Provides credibility and access to premium global markets where sustainability standards are mandatory. Helps in resource conservation, ensuring fish stocks and marine ecosystems are maintained. Enhances income opportunities and resilience for fishing communities through sustainable harvesting and fair-trade practices.

India and MSC Certification

Ashtamudi Clam Fishery - India's Milestone

The Ashtamudi estuary clam fishery in Kerala became the first Indian fishery to receive MSC certification in 2014. It demonstrated community-based management and sustainable harvesting practices. The fishery is now undergoing re-certification (2024–25) to maintain compliance with sustainability benchmarks.

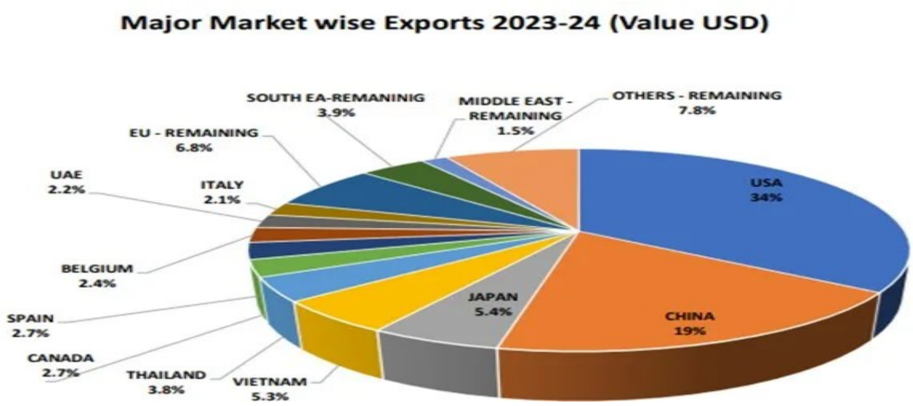
Expected Impact of Re-Certification - Could increase fishery revenue by around 30%, as MSC-labelled products command higher market value. Offers market diversification, reducing dependence on the U.S., especially amid potential trade restrictions. Encourages local fishers to adopt ecologically sustainable methods, balancing livelihoods and environmental protection.

India's Seafood Industry - Current Scenario

Global Standing - India ranks as the second-largest fish-producing country globally, contributing about 8% to global fish production. The sector plays a crucial role in food security, employment, and foreign exchange earnings.

Major Fish-Producing States

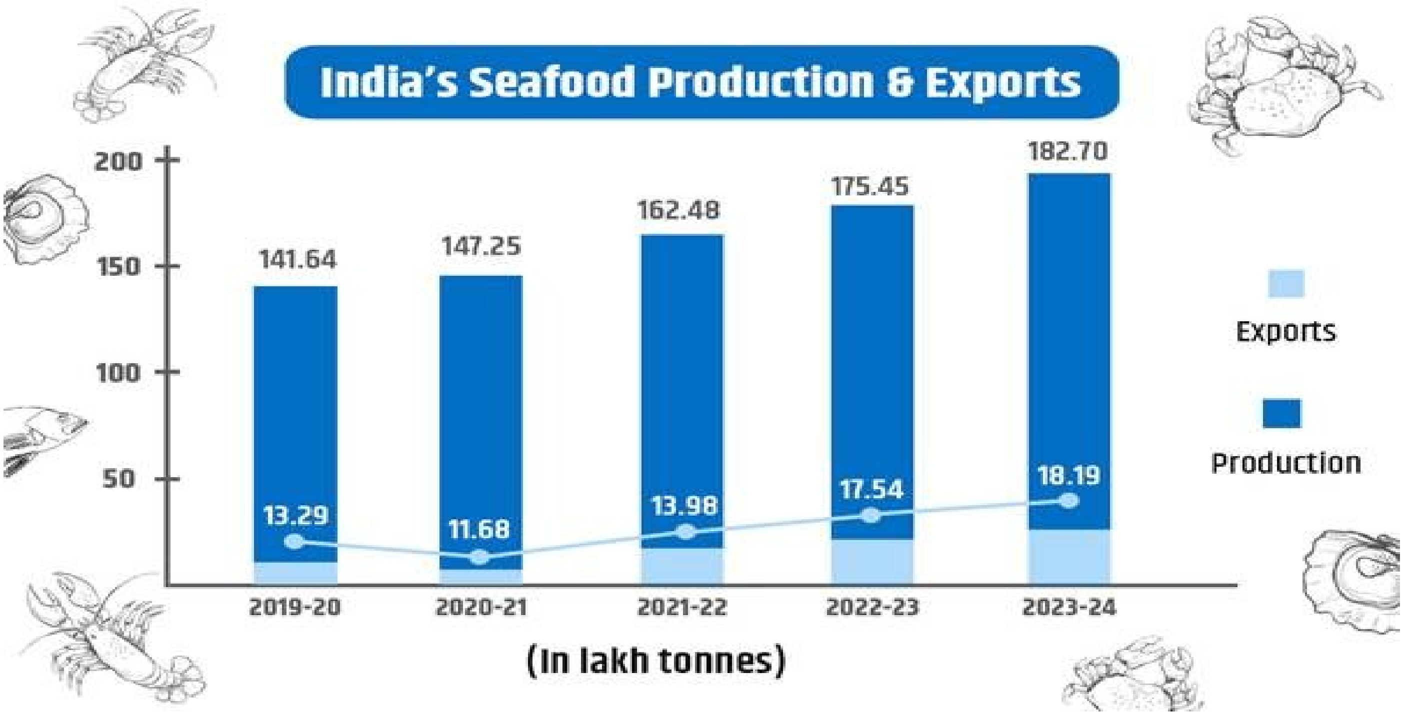
The eight major fish-producing states are - Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Odisha, Tamil Nadu, and West Bengal. Andhra Pradesh leads in aquaculture, particularly in shrimp farming.



Export Performance (2024–25) - India's total seafood exports were valued at USD 7.38 billion, with a volume of 1.78 million metric tonnes. Frozen shrimp continued as the top export commodity, accounting for 66% of export earnings (USD 4.88 billion). India exported marine products to **132 countries**, highlighting its global footprint. The top five export destinations are USA, China, Japan, Vietnam, and Thailand.

Market Composition (2023–24) - The U.S. accounted for 34.53% of export value. China and Japan remain key markets for diversified product categories like frozen fish and squid.

Challenges Facing India's Seafood Sector



1. Decline in Export Revenue - Heavy reliance on the U.S. market makes India vulnerable to tariff changes, non-tariff barriers, and anti-dumping duties. Rising competition from countries like Ecuador and Vietnam affects India's price competitiveness.

2. Overfishing and Resource Depletion - Unregulated fishing, excessive catch limits, and destructive gear usage threaten marine biodiversity and ecosystem balance. Lack of strict enforcement of fishing bans during breeding seasons contributes to stock depletion.

3. Climate Change and Pollution Impacts - Ocean warming, acidification, and coastal pollution disrupt fish breeding and migration cycles. Increased incidence of fish mortality and coral bleaching impacts productivity.

4. Infrastructure and Quality Barriers - Inadequate cold chain logistics and processing infrastructure lead to post-harvest losses. Stringent international sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) standards often result in rejection of consignments. Smaller exporters struggle to meet traceability and residue testing requirements.

Government Initiatives to Strengthen the Fisheries Sector

1. Marine Products Export Development Authority (MPEDA) – A statutory body under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. Provides financial assistance for upgrading processing units, establishing quality testing labs, and participating in international seafood fairs. Plays a pivotal role in enhancing quality standards, branding, and export competitiveness.

2. Aquaculture Support and Technology Transfer - Promotes sustainable aquaculture practices, disease management, and feed efficiency. Disseminates advanced technologies like Recirculatory Aquaculture Systems (RAS) and Biofloc Technology (BFT) to enhance productivity.

3. Fiscal Support and Duty Reductions (Budget 2024–25) - The government has reduced or removed import duties on key aquaculture feed ingredients to lower input costs and boost competitiveness. Key duty reductions include – Complete removal on fish lipid oil, algal prime, crude fish oil, and pre-dust breaded powder. Significant cuts on krill meal, mineral and vitamin premixes, and prawn/shrimp and fish feed. These measures aim to make Indian seafood price-competitive globally.

4. Export Incentives under RoDTEP Scheme - The Remission of Duties and Taxes on Export Products

(RoDTEP) scheme has been enhanced. Refund rates for various seafood products increased from 2.5% to 3.1% of export value, ensuring greater returns for exporters. Facilitates export diversification and compliance with WTO norms.

5. Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY) - Launched under the Blue Revolution vision, it aims at doubling fishers' income and modernizing the fisheries sector. Focus areas include -

– Cold chain and storage infrastructure to reduce post-harvest losses.

– Fish seed and feed improvement, genetic upgradation, and disease control.

– Sustainable marine and inland fisheries, with ecological balance. Integrates with PM Gati Shakti and Sagarmala for port-led export development.

Way Forward for India's Sustainable Seafood Growth

Adoption of International Certifications - Encourage more fisheries to obtain MSC or similar certifications to ensure global market access and eco-compliance.

Diversification of Export Markets - Reduce dependence on the U.S. by exploring EU, Middle East, and East Asian markets.

Investment in Blue Economy - Strengthen fisheries infrastructure, marine biotechnology, and climate-resilient aquaculture through targeted investment.

Sustainability and Regulation - Implement science-based fishing quotas, enforce seasonal bans, and promote eco-labelling for consumer transparency.

Community Empowerment - Promote cooperative fishing societies, capacity building, and women's participation in post-harvest and processing activities.

Source - https - //www.thehindu.com/news/national/to-counter-trade-ban-fisheries-sector-eyes-new-markets-with-eco-friendly-label/article70132463.ece