



Indian Fisheries in 2026: What is Changing in Our Seas, Rivers and Fishing Communities?

*Chamundeswari Bitli¹, Md Ibran Ansari², Madhavi K¹, Vaijanth A¹, Neha P¹, Prasanna Laxmi U¹, Sirisha H¹, Sravani K¹, Usha Rani A¹ and Kranthi Kumar D¹

¹College of Fishery Science, Narasapuram, Andhra Pradesh Fisheries University, India

²The Neotia University, Kolkata, West Bengal, India

*Corresponding Author's email: chamubitli@gmail.com

Indian fisheries are changing rapidly from traditional fishing towards a wider system involving capture fisheries, aquaculture, deep-sea fishing, digital technology, cold chains, seafood processing and organised marketing. Fish production increased from 147.25 lakh tonnes in 2020–21 to 197.75 lakh tonnes in 2024–25. Marine fish landings reached about 35.7 lakh tonnes in 2025, while seafood exports reached ₹73,890.46 crore in 2025–26. These changes create opportunities for fishers, farmers, entrepreneurs and young people. At the same time, climate variability, extreme weather, fishing pressure, market changes and resource management remain important challenges. This article highlights the major changes in Indian fisheries and emerging opportunities for sustainable fisheries development and entrepreneurship.

Keywords: Aquaculture, blue economy, fisheries, fishing communities, marine fisheries.

Introduction

India has a long fishing tradition. Coastal communities depend on the sea, while inland fishers depend on rivers, reservoirs, lakes and ponds. Fisheries provide food, employment and income. Today, the sector is expanding beyond catching fish to include aquaculture, modern vessels, digital services, cold storage, processing, transportation, exports and value addition. India's fish production increased from **147.25 lakh tonnes in 2020–21 to 197.75 lakh tonnes in 2024–25**. Marine fish landings increased from 34.7 lakh tonnes in 2024 to 35.7 lakh tonnes in 2025. During 2025–26, seafood exports reached **19.72 lakh tonnes valued at ₹73,890.46 crore**. These trends show the growing economic importance of fisheries.

Indian Fisheries at a Glance

Indian fisheries include both **capture fisheries and aquaculture**. Capture fisheries depend on natural waters, while aquaculture involves farming aquatic organisms under managed conditions. Growth in the sector is also increasing demand for ice plants, cold storage, transportation, processing, retail markets and other services. Fisheries are therefore becoming a complete value chain rather than only a production activity.

Table 1. Selected indicators of Indian fisheries

Indicator	Recent status
Fish production, 2020–21	147.25 lakh tonnes
Fish production, 2024–25	197.75 lakh tonnes
Marine fish landings, 2025	35.7 lakh tonnes
Seafood exports, 2025–26	₹73,890.46 crore
Seafood export quantity, 2025–26	19.72 lakh tonnes
Frozen shrimp export value, 2025–26	₹49,037.93 crore

Source: Department of Fisheries, Government of India; ICAR-CMFRI; MPEDA, 2026.

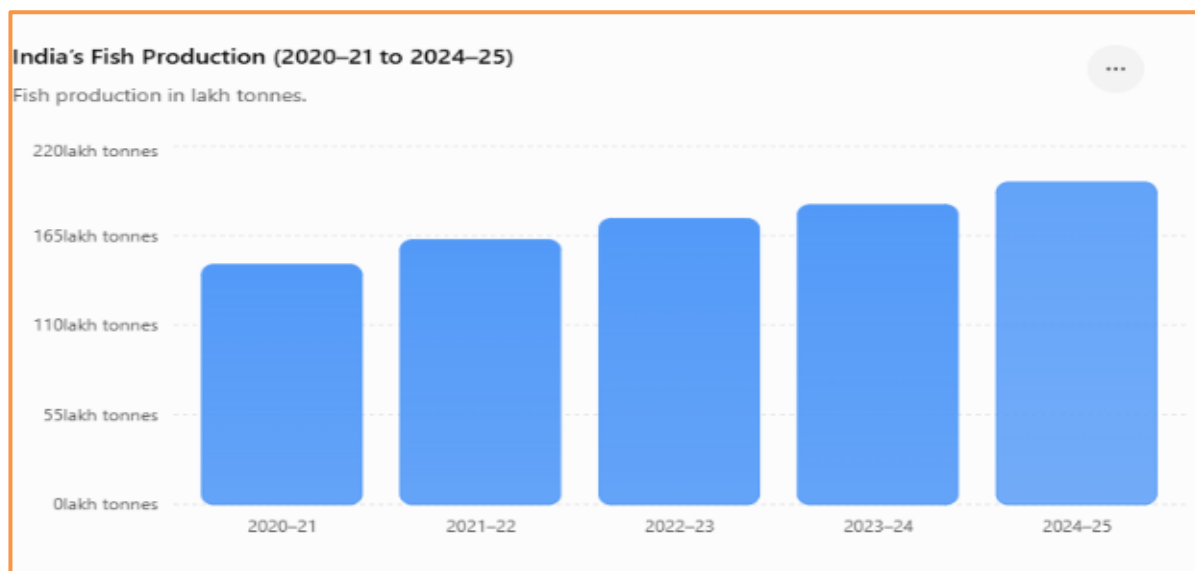


Figure 1. Growth of India's total fish production (simple bar graph).

Source: Department of Fisheries, Government of India (2026).

Marine Fisheries: Changing Opportunities

Marine fishing remains an important livelihood along India's coast. In 2025, Indian mackerel was the leading landed resource, followed by cephalopods and oil sardine. Tamil Nadu recorded about 6.85 lakh tonnes and was the leading state in marine fish landings. Karnataka showed recovery, while Gujarat recorded a decline. Fish catches vary with weather, cyclones, fishing bans, sea conditions, fish movement and availability of target species. Therefore, national growth does not mean that every fishing village experiences the same change.

From Coastal Fishing to Deep-Sea Opportunities

India is giving greater attention to its **Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)**, extending up to 200 nautical miles from the coast. Regulated systems such as the Access Pass are intended to improve monitoring and sustainable use of offshore resources. Tuna and tuna-like fishes are important opportunities. Deep-sea fishing requires suitable boats, navigation and communication equipment, fish-finding systems, trained workers, onboard storage and safety arrangements. It therefore needs skill, investment and scientific management.

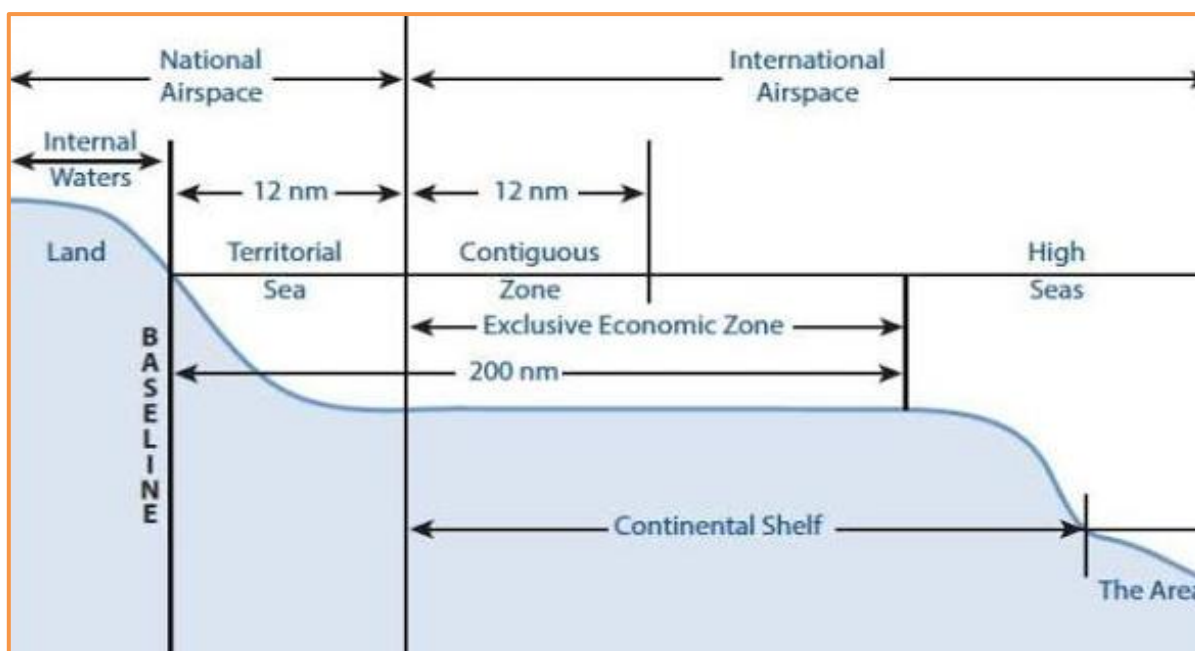


Figure 2. Representation of different zones of oceanic water

Rivers and Reservoirs: Opportunities for Inland Fishers

Rivers, reservoirs, lakes, ponds and wetlands support inland fisheries and rural livelihoods. Reservoir fisheries can provide food, employment and income when properly managed. Important measures include scientific stocking, suitable fishing gears, protection of breeding areas, organised landing, ice and cold storage, improved transport and better market access. Inland fisheries also face fluctuating water levels, pollution, invasive species, competing water uses and habitat changes. Production should therefore be combined with ecosystem conservation.

Aquaculture is Changing Fish Production

Aquaculture is becoming increasingly important. FAO reported that global aquatic-animal production reached a record level in 2024 and aquaculture production crossed **100 million tonnes for the first time**. In India, opportunities include freshwater fish culture, shrimp farming, ornamental fish culture and cage culture. Modern aquaculture increasingly depends on quality seed, improved feed, water-quality monitoring, disease management, biosecurity, aeration, digital records and better marketing. Young entrepreneurs can enter seed production, feed supply, equipment, fish health services, cold storage and fish marketing. Production must, however, be balanced with water quality, biodiversity and local livelihoods.

Seafood Exports and Global Markets

India exported **19.72 lakh tonnes of seafood worth ₹73,890.46 crore during 2025–26**. Frozen shrimp remained the major export product, contributing about **40.19% of export quantity and 66.52% of export earnings in US-dollar terms**. Export growth creates employment in processing, packaging, cold storage, transportation, quality control and marketing, not only in fishing and farming.

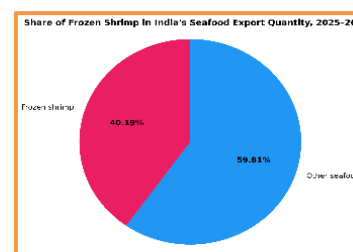


Figure 3. Share of frozen shrimp in India's seafood export quantity, 2025–26. Source: MPEDA, Government of India (2026).

Cold Chain, Quality and Traceability

Fish is highly perishable, so proper handling is essential. Ice, cold storage and hygienic transportation help maintain freshness and reduce post-harvest losses. The sector is therefore developing ice plants, cold stores, insulated transport, modern markets, processing facilities and better retail outlets. **Traceability** is also important, especially for export markets. It allows fish to be tracked from its source through the supply chain and supports quality and food safety.

Technology is Entering Fisheries

Traditional knowledge remains valuable, but modern technology is increasingly supporting fisheries. GPS helps navigation; sonar and fish finders help identify underwater features and fish schools; mobile phones support communication; weather and ocean advisories improve planning; and digital registration, catch records and traceability support management. Technology can improve safety and market access, but it should complement rather than replace the knowledge of experienced fishers about fishing grounds, seasons, weather and fish movement.

Fishing Communities and Entrepreneurship

Fisheries involve many people beyond fish catching. Women contribute to fish vending, drying, processing and marketing, while boat builders, net makers, transporters, ice suppliers and traders also depend on the sector. Fishers increasingly need knowledge of market prices, quality standards, government schemes, digital services, financial support, safety regulations and value addition. Cooperatives and Fish Farmer Producer Organisations can improve access to inputs, markets and services. For young people, fisheries should be viewed as a **business opportunity as well as a traditional occupation**. Opportunities include fish farming, ornamental fish, seed production, feed, processing, cold-chain services,

transportation, digital marketing, fish-waste utilisation, packaging, equipment and consultancy.

Climate Change and Sustainable Fisheries

Changes in temperature, rainfall, salinity, river flow, storms and extreme weather can affect fish availability and fishing conditions. Reliable weather forecasts, mobile advisories and early-warning systems can support safer decisions. Sustainable fisheries aim to maintain fish populations while supporting fisher livelihoods. Important practices include selective fishing, reducing bycatch, seasonal protection, scientific assessment of stocks and fishing effort, and participation of fishers in management. Sustainable fisheries require cooperation among fishers, scientists, government, markets and consumers.

Fisheries and the Blue Economy

The fisheries value chain is much wider than fishing:

Fishing → Landing → Icing → Transport → Processing → Packaging → Marketing → Consumer

Every stage can create employment and business opportunities. The sector can therefore contribute strongly to India's blue economy while supporting rural livelihoods and food security.

The Future of Indian Fisheries

Indian fisheries are becoming more connected, technology-oriented and market-oriented. The shift can be seen in several areas:

Future development should remain inclusive. Modern boats, digital systems and export markets should also benefit small-scale fishers, women, rural youth and traditional fishing communities.

Earlier approach	Emerging approach
Nearshore fishing	Greater offshore opportunities
Local markets	National and global markets
Fresh fish sales	Value-added products
Manual information	Digital advisories
Traditional navigation	GPS and electronic systems
Limited storage	Cold-chain facilities
Individual activity	Cooperatives and producer organisations
Production focus	Production plus sustainability
Catch quantity	Quality and traceability
Fishing as occupation	Fisheries entrepreneurship

Conclusion

Indian fisheries in 2026 are undergoing a major transformation through growth in aquaculture, marine and inland fisheries, technology, cold chains and seafood exports. The future should focus not only on higher production but also on sustainable resource use, fish quality, safety and better livelihoods. For students and young entrepreneurs, fisheries offer opportunities in aquaculture, processing, cold storage, transportation, digital marketing, fish health, equipment, value addition and seafood exports. The strongest path forward is a balance of traditional knowledge, modern science, technology, sustainable management and strong fishing communities. Indian fisheries are moving from “catching fish” towards “creating value from fish.”

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