

Sixteenth Loksabha

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Title: Regarding lifting of ban on sea-cucumbers.

SHRI A. ANWHAR RAAJHAA (RAMANATHAPURAM): Sea-cucumbers, the brainless sea-animals of the star-fish (Echinoderms) family are found in plenty in and around the coasts of India and world-over living on dirt. Every Sea-cucumber lays lakhs of eggs even without mating. Sea-cucumber population is found at least one thousand per square meter mostly in deep waters and few species in shallow waters. But still even without giving proper thought the Ministry of Environment & Forest has banned catching of Sea-cucumbers through an amendment to the Wild Life Protection Act. Unfortunately and ironically only the Government of India has enlisted Sea-cucumbers among 62rare sea-species. There is no such ban in any of our immediate neighbouring countries like Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and China. Both the IUCNR - International Union for the Conservation of Natural Resources and our own CMFRI - Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute have categorically stated that Sea-cucumbers are not at all extinct species. In fact they have only suggested regulatory and scientific methods of conservation wherever sea-cucumbers are caught on a large scale.

In the coast of Rameswaram and the surroundings, catching of sea-cucumbers is not done in a routine manner. Instead they are incidentally found among the fish-catches. Separating them completely from the fishes is near impossible in the seas when fishermen concentrate only on fishing. On reaching the shores, fishermen throw away the sea-cucumbers. Such wastes are gathered in small quantity by poor pickers. They would wait for opportune time to sell them to some agents who find medicinal value in them. Even possession of such thrown-away sea-cucumbers by the poor people is treated like a big criminal act. Poachers can be punished but not those accidentally catch or sell the thrown away items. Over enthusiastic Forest-officials in our area harass such poor men. This high-handedness is deplorable.

The only solution for this problem is to lift the irrational ban on catching sea cucumbers. So, I urge upon the Centre to lift this unwise ban on a false premise.