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PART I—Orders and Notifications by the Governor of West Bengal, the High Court, Government Treasury, etc.

**GOVERNMENT OF WEST BENGAL**

**Department of Fisheries, Aquaculture, Aquatic Resources and Fishing Harbours,  
IT Building (7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> Floor),  
31, GN Block, Sector-V, Salt Lake City, Kolkata - 700 091**

No. 2073-Fish/C-1/9R-02/2023

Dated, Kolkata, the 27<sup>th</sup> July, 2023

**NOTIFICATION**

**West Bengal Inland Fisheries Policy, 2023**

**1.0 Context**

**1.1** West Bengal is endowed with six agro-climatic regions with diverse aquatic resources with more than eight lakh hectare of inland water bodies and a coast line of 158 km. There is great diversity in fishery sector from cold water to marine and everything in between (inland, brackish water, wetland). The state produced 20.45 lakh metric ton of fish and 27 billion of fish seeds during 2022-23. In addition, it also exported 1.17 lakh metric ton of fish (mostly frozen shrimp) worth more than Rs. 5000 crore. If all the water bodies are gainfully utilized the total fish production in the state can reach around 33 lakh MT per year.

While there has been wide scale private sector participation in the brackish water sector resulting in high growth, there has been limited private investment in the inland freshwater fisheries. The average productivity in inland fisheries is around three ton per hectare which can be increased to six to eight ton per hectare through scientific fish farming. This policy is being proposed to create an enabling ecosystem which will trigger private sector participation in this sector including those of the self-help groups and Fish Production Groups (FPG).

For the purpose of the analysis, cold water fisheries being practiced in the hilly areas of Darjeeling and Kalimpong have also been included. It is expected that this policy will create enabling framework for fish production at wide scale in the State and especially in inland fisheries sector.

**2.0 Objectives of the policy**

**2.1** To provide gainful employment to the rural youth with sustained income and ensuring enhancement in inland fresh water fish production by unlocking vast fish production potential while preserving aquatic biodiversity

and ecosystems by promoting economically viable, ecologically sustainable and scientific evidence based interventions.

- 2.2 To provide a framework to create a symbiotic environment ensuring coexistence of existing community based organisations like cooperatives, Fish Production Groups, Self Help Groups and private entrepreneurs/ investors to infuse new technologies and much needed financial investment/credit in the fishery sector by providing need based incentives and policy interventions.
- 2.3 To provide quality source of protein at affordable price as nutritional support to people in general and school going children in particular.
- 2.4 To expand tapestry of social security network to the members of Fishermen communities by providing housing, pension and financial help in case of demise of earning member of the family.
- 2.5 In view of decreasing marine aquatic resources and dwindling production from the disease sensitive brackish water aquaculture, export markets have recently been hit hard. This new policy will also provide resilience to this sector by promoting and diversifying inland fish products and export basket by providing incentives to the inland fishermen for culture of new species as per global export market demands.
- 2.6 To promote and support research and innovations for reduction of input cost, improvement of breeding protocols, diversification of species and conservation of aquatic resources.

### 3.0 Policy Contours

#### Expanding Fish Production :

#### 3.1 Settlement of Government Owned Water Bodies for pisciculture :

- 3.1.1 Large water bodies of area more than 5 acres which are under-utilized, may be leased out to private entrepreneurs or fishermen cooperative societies/SHGs/FPOs/FFPGs through a centralized online bidding system.
- 3.1.2 Reserve price may be fixed as a percentage of the likely revenue from pisciculture, to be calculated on the basis of volume of water body and not on the basis of water area alone.
- 3.1.3 Lease may be given for five to seven years, so as to incentivize the lessee to make long term investments with a provision of renewal for another 3-5 years (with an enhanced lease rent) on satisfactory fish production and rent deposition.
- 3.1.4 Private investors will involve local community-based organizations for actual fish rearing to the extent possible.
- 3.1.5 Government will take necessary initiative for initial restoration and preparation of the water body to make the same suitable for pisciculture.
- 3.1.6 Fish production, revenue collection and other data will be collected online from the lessees of such leased water bodies for further necessary policy intervention by the Government.
- 3.1.7 System of taking bank guarantee, at the time of signing of lease agreement, in lieu of advance lease rent will be introduced to ensure proper and timely realization of lease amount.
- 3.1.8 In all leased-out Government water bodies, lessees i.e. Cooperatives/SHGs/FFPGs/FFPOs may enter into management contract with private entrepreneurs/companies/firms for the leased period for the purpose of introducing best management practices and investment in scientific pisciculture.

#### 3.2 Incentives to Owners of Private Water Bodies :

- 3.2.1 For large water bodies having area of more than 5 acres which are *privately* owned, incentives will be provided in the form of credit linkage, margin money, transport and other infrastructure support if the owners of the water body form FFPOs for scientific pisciculture.
- 3.2.2 Owners of private water bodies may enter into management contract with private entrepreneurs/companies/firms for the purpose of introducing best management practices and investment in scientific pisciculture.
- 3.2.3 **Compensation in case of crop failure for reasons beyond control of fishermen :** Individual fisherman practising pisciculture in water body/ies having area up to one hectare as well as Fishermen's Cooperatives/

SHGs/FPGs practising pisciculture in water bodies having area of more than five hectares and organised as FFPOs will be compensated by State Government in the event of loss of more than 75% fish production, if the loss be caused by any natural calamity or by events beyond control of the fisherman/members of the Cooperative/FPG/SHG but not covered under the insurance scheme being availed by the fisherman etc.

**3.3 Demonstration Centers :** Big Government owned water bodies, having area of more than 10 hectares, and land available at Government farms, will be earmarked by Government for setting up of Demonstration Centers by private entrepreneurs for infusion of private capital and introduction of latest pisciculture techniques. These centers will spread the best practices of scientific and innovative pisciculture and will encourage farmers at large to opt for adopting such type of capital and technology intensive pisciculture which, in turn, will increase fish production.

**3.4 Involving Women SHGs :**

**3.4.1** In rural areas, women SHGs may be encouraged to take small private ponds on lease and go for aquaculture including spawn to table fish production. To build the first link in this value chain, hatcheries will be established and accredited involving *Upsangha* or *Sangha* in *each district*.

**3.4.2** Necessary training will be given to them in this regard, Government will also facilitate the procurement of quality brooders by the women SHGs.

**3.5** Once the hatcheries are established as above, it will ensure availability of quality spawns in the districts. A part of these spawns will be bought back by Government and supplied to different Women Self Help Groups in *each Block* to produce fingerlings. A part of the fingerlings produced may also be bought back by Government and provided to other set of women groups who can rear them and sell them either in the local market or provide them for the Mid-Day Meal program in the secondary schools. Credit linkage for providing the working capital for taking up the above schemes will be provided and instruments like Matsyajeebi Credit Card (MJCC). Mobile transport support will be provided through the central/state sponsored scheme. To provide cold chain support, mini-ice making units will be established by the *Upsangha* or *Sangha*.

**3.6 Promotion of Cold Water Fisheries :** In hilly areas of Darjeeling and Kalimpong district, the old *Jhoras* (natural ponds with inlet/outlet) will be utilized for cold water pisciculture with 40 percent financial assistance from the Government. In addition, Re-circulatory Aquaculture System (RAS) will be promoted involving progressive farmers with an assistance of upto 40%. Also, *hapa* (small rearing pond/grow out ponds) will be dug up for rearing of fingerling to table fish with upto 40% assistance.

**3.7 Credit Linkage for input cost :** Fishermen groups (FPO/SHG/Fishermen cooperatives etc.) will be provided assistance up to 40% of the input cost on pro-rata basis for pisciculture in leased ponds or ponds privately owned. Balance fund will be arranged by own contribution of fish farmers or through credit linkage/fishermen credit card.

**3.8 Pen Culture for reservoirs/wetland/oxbow lakes :** Up to forty percent of the pen cost will be provided by way of subsidy to promote pisciculture in reservoir/wetlands/oxbow lake in parts where depth is less than five feet. In other part of such water bodies capture fishing may be encouraged by subsidizing fingerling cost up to 60%.

**3.9 Promotion of Ornamental Fisheries :**

**3.9.1** To promote Ornamental Fisheries, financial assistance up to 60% of the total project cost but not exceeding Rs.15 lakh will be provided by the Government to SHGs/FPGs/Private entrepreneurs for *integrated* ornamental fisheries projects.

**3.9.2** Financial assistance up to 60% of the total project cost but not exceeding Rs. 6 lakh per retail outlet will be provided by the Government for the purpose of marketing of ornamental fishes.

**3.9.3** One-time financial incentive for buying new aquarium by the owner/ management of private restaurant, hotels, shopping mall/ branded retail outlets, hospitals, banks and schools will be provided at the rate commensurate with the capacity of the aquarium to be notified in due course.

**3.10 Promotion of Cage Culture :**

**3.10.1** Licensing policy will be notified by the Fisheries Department in consultation with the Irrigation & Waterways Department and the Environment Department to lease out up to a maximum of 5% area of the large water reservoirs/check dams in possession of Irrigation & Waterways Department for practicing cage culture.

**3.10.2** Similarly, water bodies created in abandoned coal mines or stone quarries under possession of the State Government shall also be utilized for pisciculture with private participation. Financial and technical assistance will be provided. Up to 40% of the cage cost not exceeding Rs. 5 Lakh will be provided for the unit having not less than 20 cages.

**3.11 Conservation of Bio-diversity and Diversification of Aquaculture :**

**3.11.1** In order to maintain biodiversity of fishes and conserving the endangered/ scheduled fish species, Government will provide financial incentives up to 80% of total project cost but not exceeding Rs.12 lakh to farmers for setting up new hatcheries.

**3.11.2** State Government shall publish/notify the list of such endangered/ scheduled species.

**3.11.3** New high yielding species like Genetically Improved Farmed Tilapia (GIFT) will be promoted by issuing new hatchery/ farming licences and providing training to such fish farmers.

**3.12 Infrastructure :**

**3.12.1 Setting up of new Feed Mills :** Fish Production Groups (FPGs)/ SHGs/ Cooperatives, etc. will be involved in setting up of small and medium fish feed mills. Financing will be facilitated under different Government schemes for this purpose. Financial assistance up to 60% of the total project cost and not exceeding Rs.60.00 lakh will be provided by the Government for this purpose. Government will promote use of BAP certified fish feed.

**3.13 Strengthening of Cold Chain :**

**3.13.1** Creation of chain of cold storages with participation of private investors with government assistance up to 60% only of the total project cost but not exceeding Rs. 90 lakh per unit will be encouraged.

**3.13.2** In addition, tax rebate will be provided for registration of insulated/ refrigerated vehicle for transportation of fishes and fish products.

**3.14 Upgradation and Improvement of Fish Markets :**

**3.14.1** In order to ensure minimum hygiene and food safety standards, a survey of all retail and whole-sale fish markets had been carried out by the Fisheries Department to assess the infrastructural gaps like non-availability of storage for unsold fish, fish cleaning and washing area/facility, toilets, drinking water, electronic weighing machine, drainage, shade, lighting arrangements etc. Government assistance, up to 60% of the total cost of improvement projects, will be given to the Managing Committees of such markets subject to an upper limit of Rs. 60 lakh.

**3.15 Fisheries/Aquaculture Testing Infrastructure Development :** Laboratory for soil and water quality assessment, feed testing, disease detection etc. at the Block HQ will be made operational through PPP model for scaling up scientific pisciculture/aquaculture in the State.

**3.16 Development of Decentralized Infrastructure :** State Government will facilitate creation of de-centralized infrastructure by way of establishing new hatcheries, fish feed mills, cold storages, ice plants and fish/aquaculture products processing/value addition units/plants with beneficiary's contribution and Governmental financial assistance as above. Emphasis will be given to establish small and medium scale units closer to *clusters* of water bodies under scientific pisciculture.

**Building Institutions and human capital :****3.17 Revival of Sick and Non-functional Fishermen Cooperatives :**

**3.17.1** Survey of the current functional status of the existing fishermen cooperatives having lease of Government owned water bodies will be done by the Government every three years.

- 3.17.2** Necessary training on financial, managerial and technical aspects of pisciculture will be imparted for revival of sick and non-functional fishermen cooperatives.
- 3.17.3** If any co-operative society fails to revive even after consecutive two years from the date of completion of training, water bodies will be leased out to new entrepreneurs as per the extant Government policy.
- 3.18 Preference to Fishermen Cooperative Societies :**
- 3.18.1** Necessary amendments in rules will be made to enable private entrepreneurs including community based organizations to participate in water body auction process in first round itself.
- 3.18.2** Cooperatives, FPGs/SHGs will be given 5% price preference over the highest bidder.
- 3.18.3** For the purpose of leasing out any Government water body, number of members of the participating fishermen cooperative will be commensurate with the area of the water body to make pisciculture economically viable.
- 3.19 Human Resource Development :**
- 3.19.1** Government will take steps for development of trained human resources for extension services in rural areas and in private sector activities like hatcheries, fish feed plants, processing units etc.
- 3.19.2** Diploma and certificate courses in hatcheries, fish feed plant, fish processing plant, cold storage operation, etc., in consultation with the industry; will be introduced to cater the needs of technicians, operator and other technical support staff in private sector.
- 3.20 Role of NGOs :** State Government will encourage participation of Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in training and organizing fishermen in the form of Fish Farmers' Production Organization (FFPOs) so that fishermen can avail incentives to be provided to FFPOs. In the initial phases small Fish Production Groups (FPGs) may be formed which may be federated into larger FFPOs as group dynamics builds up.
- 3.21 Legal Framework :**
- 3.21.1 Legal Protection Against Fish Stock Poisoning :** To provide legal protection to the fishermen against poisoning of fish stock and other destructive fishing activities, such offences will be made non-bailable.
- 3.21.2 Fishing ban period :** Fishing ban in coastal areas within the territorial limits of State Government will be imposed from 14<sup>th</sup> April to 15<sup>th</sup> July for preservation of Hilsa fish, provided such ban period is also imposed by the government of India in Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).
- 3.21.3 Protection of Interests of the Weaker Section of the Society :** To protect the interests of the weaker sections and for increasing employment, a percentage of total area of Government owned water bodies (having an area up to 100 acres) will be reserved for the communities of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes in proportion to their percentage in total population (as per the latest available General Census data) in different Development Blocks for the purpose of settlement of water bodies for pisciculture.

By order of the Governor,

AVANINDRA SINGH  
*Secretary to the Government of West Bengal.*