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NITI Aayog Blue Economy Strategy — Harnessing Deep-Sea and Offshore Fisheries

7 April 2026

ECONOMY

GS3

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NITI Aayog Blue Economy Strategy — Harnessing Deep-Sea and Offshore Fisheries

7 April 2026 · 5 min read · 2 tags

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WHY IN NEWS

NITI Aayog released “**India’s Blue Economy: Strategy for Harnessing Deep-Sea and Offshore Fisheries**” — a phased framework to develop the country’s underutilised deep-sea and offshore fishing sector. The report was launched by **Prof. Ramesh Chand** (NITI Aayog Member) and **B.V.R. Subrahmanyam** (NITI Aayog CEO), with a roadmap stretching to 2033 and beyond.

KEY STATISTICS — INDIA’S FISHERIES SECTOR

INDICATOR	DATA
Global rank	2nd largest fish producer (after China)
Share of global fish production	~8%
Livelihoods supported	~30 million
Coastline	11,099 km
Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)	24 lakh sq km (2.4 million sq km)
Seafood exports (FY 2024-25)	Rs 62,408 crore
Union Budget 2026-27 fisheries allocation	Rs 2,761.80 crore
Continental shelf area	~5.3 lakh sq km

India’s fisheries sector contributes **~1.1% of GDP** and **~5% of agricultural GDP** — but has been historically focused on **inland and coastal fishing**, leaving deep-sea and offshore zones largely untapped.

THE THREE-PHASE STRATEGY

Phase 1 (2025-28) — Foundation Building

- Mapping deep-sea fish stocks via scientific surveys
- Building fishing vessel capacity for deep-sea operations
- Training fisherfolk in offshore navigation and safety
- Strengthening cold chain and processing infrastructure



- Pilot offshore fisheries projects in select EEZ zones

Phase 2 (2029-32) — Scale-up

- Commercial deployment of deep-sea fishing fleets
- Joint ventures with experienced international operators (Norway, Japan)
- Expansion of seafood processing exports
- Aquaculture for high-value species (tuna, shrimp)
- Ports specialised for offshore fishing fleets

Phase 3 (2033 onwards) — Maturity

- Full utilisation of EEZ and continental shelf resources
- Indian fishing fleets in international waters (under UNCLOS rules)
- Aquaculture as a major contributor (vs wild catch)
- Climate-resilient fisheries management
- Blue economy as a major employment and export sector

WHY DEEP-SEA FISHING MATTERS

1. Untapped Potential

India's **24 lakh sq km EEZ** is nearly **3x larger than its land area** — yet most fishing happens within 12 nautical miles of the coast. Deep-sea fishing extends operations to **the entire EEZ** (200 nautical miles).

2. Higher-Value Species

Deep-sea waters host high-value species — **tuna, billfish, deep-sea shrimp, lobster** — that command premium prices in international markets.

3. Reducing Coastal Pressure

Coastal fish stocks are increasingly overfished. Shifting to deep-sea operations relieves pressure on coastal ecosystems and fishing communities.

4. Export Earnings

Seafood is one of India's **largest agri-export categories** (Rs 62,408 crore in FY24-25). Expanding  catch can significantly boost exports.

WHAT IS BLUE ECONOMY?

The **Blue Economy** refers to the sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods, and ecosystem health. Components include:

SECTOR	EXAMPLES
Fisheries & aquaculture	Wild catch, aquaculture, processing
Marine biotechnology	Pharma, cosmetics, food
Offshore oil & gas	Hydrocarbons, deep-sea mining
Shipping & ports	Trade logistics
Coastal tourism	Beaches, marine adventure
Marine renewable energy	Tidal, wave, offshore wind
Marine biodiversity	Conservation, research

India's Blue Economy potential is estimated at **\$1 trillion by 2030** (NITI Aayog estimate).

INSTITUTIONAL ARCHITECTURE

INSTITUTION	ROLE
Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry & Dairying	Apex policy ministry
Department of Fisheries	Direct programme implementation
Fishery Survey of India (FSI), Mumbai	Scientific surveys and resource assessment
Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI), Kochi	Marine fisheries research
Marine Products Export Development Authority (MPEDA)	Seafood exports promotion
National Fisheries Development Board (NFDB)	Funding and capacity building
CMLRE (Centre for Marine Living Resources & Ecology), Kochi	Deep-sea biodiversity research



PMMSY — PRADHAN MANTRI MATSYA SAMPADA YOJANA

The current flagship fisheries scheme:

- Launched: **2020**
- Total outlay: **Rs 20,050 crore** over 5 years
- Aim: Boost fish production to 22 million tonnes by 2024-25 (achieved)
- Components: infrastructure, fishing vessel modernisation, post-harvest management
- Successor scheme: PMMSY 2.0 (under design)

PMMSY laid the foundation; the new Blue Economy strategy extends it specifically to **deep-sea and offshore fisheries**.

CHALLENGES

CHALLENGE	ISSUE
Vessel capability	India's fishing fleet is dominated by small mechanised boats (<20 m); deep-sea fishing requires larger vessels (20-50 m)
Skill gap	Indian fisherfolk traditionally fish coastal waters; deep-sea operations need new training
Capital intensity	Deep-sea vessels cost Rs 10-15 crore each; financing is a barrier
Climate change	Ocean warming and acidification disrupt fish stocks
International disputes	EEZ boundaries with Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Pakistan create geopolitical risk

UPSC RELEVANCE

GS Paper 3 — Economy, Environment

- Blue Economy: concept, components, India's potential
- Fisheries sector: production, exports, employment
- PMMSY scheme and its successor
- EEZ, UNCLOS, deep-sea fishing rights
- NITI Aayog's role in policy formulation



GS Paper 2 – International Relations

- IOR (Indian Ocean Region) maritime cooperation
- SAGAR doctrine
- India's engagement with regional fishing rights disputes

Prelims Fast Facts:

- India's rank in fish production: **2nd globally** (8% of global output)
- Coastline: **11,099 km**
- EEZ: **24 lakh sq km**
- Seafood exports (FY24-25): **Rs 62,408 crore**
- PMMSY launched: **2020**, outlay **Rs 20,050 crore**
- NITI Aayog Blue Economy strategy: **3 phases** (2025-28, 2029-32, 2033+)
- Apex ministry: **Fisheries, Animal Husbandry & Dairying**
- CMFRI HQ: **Kochi**

FACTS CORNER

- India's **fisheries sector grew from 7.48 million tonnes (2005-06) to ~17.5 million tonnes (2024-25)** — a 2.3x increase in two decades, making it one of the fastest-growing food sectors.
- **Marine fisheries** account for ~37% of India's fish production; the rest (~63%) is from inland aquaculture (rivers, lakes, ponds, brackish water) — India is the **world's largest inland aquaculture producer**.
- **Andhra Pradesh** is India's largest fish-producing state, contributing ~25% of total production — driven by intensive aquaculture in coastal districts.
- The **Sagarmala Programme** complements the Blue Economy strategy by developing port infrastructure and coastal economic zones — both fall under the broader maritime development umbrella.
- **Tuna** is the most valuable fish in international markets — India's tuna catch is currently very small compared to the potential in its EEZ. Deep-sea fishing would unlock this segment.
- India is a member of the **Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC)**, the international body that manages tuna stocks in the Indian Ocean.


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