

Theme 5: Conservation, restoration and management of ecosystem

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RESPONSIBLE FISHING IN CHILKA LAGOON FOR CONSERVATION OF BIODIVERSITY

M.P. Remesan*, P. Pravin and B. Meenakumari**

Central Institute of Fisheries Technology, Matsyapuri-P.O, Cochin -29, Kerala

*mpremesan@gmail.com

**DDG(Fy), Indian Council of Agricultural Research KAB II, Pusa, New Delhi – 110012

“Chilka” is a Rajasthani word which means “shining”. It is the largest brackish water lagoon in Asia located in the Puri, Khurda and Ganjam districts in Orissa. The area of the lagoon varies between 1165 and 906 sq. km during the monsoon and summer, respectively. The rich biodiversity of the lagoon comprises about 2200 flora and fauna which come under 19 groups. There are about 300 species of fish and shellfishes in the lagoon which support the livelihood of more than 2,00,000 fisherfolk. Based on its rich biodiversity and socio-economic importance, Chilika lagoon was designated as a Ramsar site in 1981 and it is also included in the list of Wetlands selected for intensive conservation and management by the Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India. Looking at the catch statistics of the lagoon from 1985 the maximum production was in 2003-04 (about 14,053t) which reduced to 10,702t in 2008-09. There may be multiple reasons for declining the catch which has to be addressed properly to have a sustainable yield. The original mouth of the lagoon was closed due to littoral shift which would have affected the biodiversity drastically. There are several fixed bag nets and long leader walls of prawn traps near the new mouth which would adversely affect the migration of fishes into the lagoon. Prawn seed collection for aquaculture in the lagoon will affect the capture of fishery. Proper input- output control should be implemented and all other steps suggested to check the habitat degradation should be followed to have sustainable fisheries as well as to conserve the biodiversity of the lagoon. Responsible fishing methods and nets with appropriate mesh sizes to facilitate the escape of juveniles can help in conservation of the biodiversity in the long run.