Alternate-day fishing regulations in the Gulf of Mannar and Palk Bay areas of Tamil Nadu

The 1970s saw major, and sometimes violent, conflicts between mechanized fishing vessels (specifically trawlers) and small-scale vessels all along the Tamil Nadu coast. This paved the way for the establishment of a unique system called “alternate-day” fishing in the Pudukkottai and Thanjavur Districts. This allowed mechanized fishing vessels to fish for three days a week, while small-scale fishers could fish on the remaining four days.

Since 1993, similar regulations have been implemented in Ramanathapuram District at the initiative of both the district authorities and fisherfolk organizations. Regulations on fishing have been put in place for the northern and southern parts of the districts. Officials of the District Directorate of Fisheries oversee the northern part of the district, that is, Palk Bay, while in the case of the Gulf of Mannar (GOM) the regulations have been formulated by fishermen’s organizations and boatowners’ associations themselves, to avoid conflicts in the fishing grounds. The “three-four day rule” system, as it has come to be called, was initiated basically to maintain law and order in the district (not as part of fishing regulation Act), and is being implemented by district-level officers. The regulation is followed by all fishermen, including non-mechanized fishermen, who observe specific times for setting sail and returning to shore.

It is important to note that, though these measures were initiated as conflict-management measures, increasingly they have contributed towards resource management in this region. It is also notable that fishermen’s organizations have actively cooperated with the district Department of Fisheries officials in implementing these regulations.