



## India - Sri Lanka: Fishermen Issue

### What is the issue?

\n\n

In a latest incident, the Sri Lankan Navy allegedly fired at a group of Indian fishermen who had allegedly crossed over into Sri Lankan waters on the lookout for a fresh catch.

\n\n

### What are the major reasons?

\n\n

\n

- According to **Joint Working Group on Fisheries (JWGF)** data, 111 boats of Tamil Nadu fishermen and 51 Indian fishermen were in arrest or detention in Sri Lanka's Northern Province.

\n

- Reasons include on-going disagreement over the territorial rights to the island of Kachchatheevu, frequent poaching by Indian fisherman in Sri Lankan waters, and the damaging economic and environmental effects of trawling.

\n

- Due to the dearth of multi-day fishing capability, Indian fishermen cannot shift their fishing effort from the Palk Bay area to the offshore areas way beyond the continental shelf.

\n

- Also, due to a gradual drop in fish count in the Indian waters, Indian fishermen are forced to wander into Sri Lankan waters as the catch is insufficient here.

\n

\n\n

### What is the issue of Kachchatheevu?

\n\n

\n

- One of the major reasons complicating the issue is of Kachchatheevu Island.
- **India ceded the uninhabited island to its southern neighbour in 1974 under a conditional accord.**
- In fact, initially the 1974 border agreement did not affect fishing on either sides of the border.
- In 1976, through an exchange of letter, both India and Sri Lanka agreed to stop fishing in each other's waters.
- In 2009, the Sri Lankan government declared Kachchatheevu Island as sacred land owing to a Catholic shrine's presence on the piece of land.
- The issue arises more out of a domestic tussle rather than the India-Sri Lanka view on the issue.
- The Central government of India, according to the 1974 accord, recognises Sri Lanka's sovereignty over Kachchatheevu.
- Tamil fishermen believe that Kachchatheevu is traditionally their territory and so they have a right to fish there.
- The Sri Lankan authorities believe that this endangers the livelihood of Sri Lankan fishermen.

\n\n

### **Was there any recent initiative taken by the govts?**

\n\n

\n

- In November 2016, an inter-ministerial delegation discussed terms for a joint working group but the Sri Lankan delegation rejected India's request for a three year grace period so that the government can assist fishermen to move from bottom trawling fishing method to another sustained and effective method.

\n

\n\n

### **What is the way ahead?**

\n\n

\n

- **India can try to get back the island of Kachchatheevu** on “lease in perpetuity”.

\n

- Permit licensed Indian fishermen to fish within a designated area of Sri Lankan waters and vice versa.

\n

- There is a glaring **need for institutionalisation of fishing in Indian waters** by the government of India so that alternative means of livelihood are provided.

\n

- Government will have to mark up a comprehensive plan to reduce the **dependence of Indian fishermen on catch from Palk Bay.**

\n

\n\n

\n\n

**Source: The Indian Express, IDSA**

\n



**IAS PARLIAMENT**  
*Information is Empowering*  
A Shankar IAS Academy Initiative