



Brief Report with Decisions of the

**National Council Meeting
19-20 November, New Delhi**

NATIONAL PLATFORM FOR SMALL SCALE FISH WORKERS

National Council of NPSSFW was in session from 19th to 20th December 2021 in New Delhi. 34 delegates including National Council members from 14 states and 4 advisers of NPSSFW participated in the meeting. Representatives from Andaman Nicobar and Tamil Nadu joined NPSSFW National Council meeting for the first time, taking the number of state participation to twenty.

Welcome, Self Introduction and Observation of Silence in Respect of the Departed:

Participants were welcomed by Soumen Ray, National Coordinator of NPSSFW and Dipak Dholakia, Delhi Coordinator of NPSSFW and Convener of Indian Community Activist Network (ICAN).

Following this all participants self introduced themselves.

The house observed 2 minutes silence in respectful memory of all fishing community members and activists who passed away after the last physical National Council Meeting. A special reference was made by Pradip Chatterjee to Margarida Carmo Silveira (Maggie), National Council Member of NPSSFW who passed away on 1st June 2021.

Agenda and Context Setting:

Next, Pradip Chatterjee, National Convener of NPSSFW explained the purport of the agenda items in the present situation. He stressed on Climate Crisis and NPSSFW's participation in the Peoples' Summit at CoP26 in Glasgow, the general lack of right of the small scale fishers and fish farmers on water bodies – their main source of livelihood and the Indian Marine Fisheries Bill 2021 which is drafted in utterly undemocratic procedure and, if not withdrawn, going to hurt small scale marine fishing communities severely. He also mentioned the need to discuss the problems and prospects E-Shram Registration pushed by the government.

He requested the delegates hailing from different states to present the National Council with an assessment of the objective situation of fisheries and their organisational efforts in respective states together with their plans for future to help NPSSFW chart out a national road map for campaign and organisation.

Reporting of CoP26 Climate Conference and NPSSFW's Participation in the People's Summit:

Soumya Dutta, adviser of NPSSFW and the Chief Organiser of NPSSFW's participation in the event briefed the delegates of the outcome of CoP26 and cautioned the House of the Blue Carbon initiatives contemplated by the state governments. He reiterated the grave consequences regarding global warming and climate change that is going to endanger the existence of human civilisation in general and the fishing communities in particular. He also acclaimed the participation of NPSSFW in the People's summit as the only small scale fish

workers' organisation and commended Siddharth Chacrabarty for his efforts to raise the community's concerns there.

NPSSFW National Council requested Soumya Dutta to present a note on action points that should be taken up by fishing communities to address the issue.

Reflections on Fishing Communities' Bond with Water:

In a short but illuminating discourse Sandeep Chachra, adviser to NPSSFW and Executive Director of Action Aid India dwelt on the bond with water of the humanity in general and the fishing communities in particular. While raising the need of equitable distribution of water resources he mentioned the need of water bodies and associated bio-diversity to sustain them so that they can continue to provide eco-system services.

Workshop - Fishing Communities' Right to Water:

A presentation on Fishing Communities' Right on Water was made by Debasis Shyamal, National Council Member of NPSSFW. The main points highlighted were that –

- Fishing Communities' livelihood depends on fish resources and fish cannot live without water. So the bond between fishing communities and water bodies is inalienable.
- Fishing Communities' Right to Water means right to access the water bodies and their fish resources sustainably for fishing or fish farming as well as their right to protect the water bodies and their fish resources.
- Leasing of public water bodies by the Government means privatising the water commons. Fishing Communities must have community user right (pani patta) and the right to protect their water bodies from encroachments and pollution.
- Small scale Fish Farmers who take private water bodies on lease must have security of tenure.
- He stated that the Right to Water campaign has the potentiality to unite all fishing communities across the country including both marine and inland sectors.

The house suggested a national campaign on **Fishing Communities' Right to Water**.

Workshop – Indian Marine Fisheries Bill 2021:

Daniel (Edwin) Das, adviser to NPSSFW and Director of Human Rights Forum presented a comprehensive analysis of the Indian Marine Fisheries Bill 2021. He mentioned that –

- The IMFB 2021 has been prepared in an utterly undemocratic manner ex-communicating the small scale fishing communities – the largest primary stakeholders of marine fish resources.
- It has defined small scale fisheries to include trawlers, purse seiners and other mechanised fishing boats.
- It has no provision for preferential access of SSF communities to marine fish resources.
- It has left no space for the SSF communities to participate in either making the rules or the management plans. There is no room for SSF communities to participate in the statutory bodies proposed to implement the Bill.
- There are many anomalies and self-contradictions that indicate that the Bill was drawn in haste.

He demanded immediate withdrawal of the Bill and introduction of a democratic participatory process to develop a Marine Fisheries Bill that serves first and foremost the livelihood interest of SSF communities and conservation of fish resources.

The house suggested strengthening national campaign to withdraw IMFB 2021.

Consultation on E-Shram Registration:

Fish Workers, as a large section of unorganised workers, have been included in the ambit of E-Shram Registration. NPSSFW, bound by its commitment to fish workers, has been instrumental to take up the issue with importance. Anup Srivastava, Adviser to NPSSFW and Programme Officer of FES made a presentation on the subject explaining –

- Its background;
- Its procedure;
- Its benefits; and
- Its shortcomings.

He urged that the fish workers should take advantage of E-Shram Registration as it would provide them with immediate Government recognition and a basis to claim rights and entitlements as fish workers.

The House decided to take forward E-Shram Registration by both facilitating the process in areas covered by NPSSFW constituents and moving the Government to make the procedure more people friendly. The House also suggested demanding the Government to link more benefits and rights with E-Shram Registration.

Organisational Briefing & Planning:

The state representatives narrated the situation of small scale fisheries in their respective states and informed the house with suggested road maps for campaign and organisation. These were noted and NPSSFW National Council pledged to act upon those. But at the same time it was also suggested that two mechanisms are indispensable for this –

1. A Documentation and Information Dissemination Centre; and
2. Regional Bodies to look after regional organisations more intimately.

It was decided that NPSSFW will request its friends and supporters for resources necessary to establish and run an effective Documentation and Information Dissemination Centre that will cater to the needs of the SSF communities in general and the NPSSFW partner organisations in particular.

It was also decided that NPSSFW will try to develop and activate Regional Committees with the participation of state organisations of a region. The Regional Committee will primarily look after the organisations of the region. The process will be activated through regional conferences.

The House was informed that the East Zone regional conference has already taken place with the participation of SSF workers' organisations from Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha and West Bengal.

It was decided to hold regional conferences next in the North-East and the South.

The house decided that a central Fishing Communities' Right to Water poster will be prepared and circulated. The central poster will be translated in all local languages for a unified campaign. Other planning of the campaign will be done in consultation with the state and regional bodies.

The House ratified the decision taken by the web meeting of NPSSFW to flag off the campaign against the IMFB 2021 by issuance of mass protest letters and signature campaigns.

The House also commended the efforts taken by NPSSFW to write to the Chief Ministers of all maritime states and all members of Parliament requesting them to oppose the Bill.

The House maintained that NPSSFW should convene a physical National Conference in 2022.

Pradip Chatterjee, delivered the concluding speech of the National Council Meeting.