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Legal Regulation of Traditional Fishing Rights in Indian Territorial Waters

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Abstract

The legal regulation of traditional fishing rights within Indian territorial waters is a complex interplay of national laws, international conventions, and customary practices. This abstract explores the framework governing these rights, emphasizing the significance of respecting indigenous and local communities' livelihoods while balancing sustainable marine resource management. Key legal instruments such as the Indian Marine Fishing Act, 1981, and the Fisheries Act, 1897, along with international commitments under UNCLOS (United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea), shape the regulatory landscape. The paper discusses the extent of traditional fishing rights, the challenges posed by modern regulatory measures, and the need for inclusive policies that safeguard traditional fisherfolk's rights without compromising marine conservation efforts. It underscores the importance of legal reforms to ensure equitable access, conflict resolution, and sustainable utilization of maritime resources in Indian waters.

Keywords: *Traditional Fishermen, UNCLOS, Territorial Waters, MFR*

Introduction

The legal regulation of traditional fishing rights in the territorial waters of India has emerged as an important area of study within maritime law, environmental law, and resource governance. India possesses a vast coastline and rich marine biodiversity that supports millions of people who depend on fisheries for their livelihood. Traditional fishing communities have existed along the coasts for centuries and have developed sustainable fishing practices based on

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indigenous knowledge and customary use of marine resources². These communities primarily engage in small-scale and artisanal fishing using non-mechanized or low-powered boats and simple fishing gear. Their activities are usually confined to the near shore waters where fishing has historically been practiced as a means of subsistence and local trade. However, in recent decades, rapid technological advancements in the fishing industry, the expansion of mechanized trawlers, increasing marine pollution, and growing coastal development have created significant challenges for traditional fishermen³. These developments have led to conflicts over access to marine resources and have threatened the economic stability of artisanal fishing communities.

The territorial waters of India extend up to twelve nautical miles from the baseline, over which the state exercises full sovereignty under the Territorial Waters, Continental Shelf, Exclusive Economic Zone and Other Maritime Zones Act, 1976⁴. In this maritime zone, the government can regulate navigation, resource exploitation, and fishing activities. The overall legal regime for maritime zones is provided by the central government but the regulation of fishing activities in territorial waters is mainly the responsibility of the coastal state governments through specific fisheries legislation. Many coastal states have passed Marine Fishing Regulation Acts for the regulation of fishing operations, protection of marine resources and to avoid conflicts between traditional fishermen and mechanized fishing vessels. Such laws typically provide for licensing of fishing vessels, zoning of fishing areas, seasonal bans on fishing and restrictions on certain types of fishing gear to ensure sustainable fisheries management.

The protection of traditional fishing rights is intimately linked to the constitutional guarantee of right to livelihood under Article 21 of the Constitution of India. Fishing communities are highly dependent on access to coastal waterways and marine resources and any restriction to these resources can have a direct impact on their socio-economic well-being. At the same time, environmental legislation such as the Environment Protection Act, 1986 and the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 play an important role in the protection of maritime ecosystems and in the promotion of sustainable use of natural resources. The legal regulation of traditional fishing

² Maarten Bavinck et al., *Interactive Fisheries Governance: A Guide to Better Practice* (Food and Agriculture Organization) 2005.

³ Venkatesh Salagrama, *Trends in Poverty and Livelihoods in Coastal Fishing Communities of India* (Food and Agriculture Organization) 2012.

⁴ Section 3 Territorial Waters, Continental Shelf, Exclusive Economic Zone and Other Maritime Zones Act, 1976

rights thus needs a careful balance between environmental protection, economic development and the preservation of the livelihood of coastal communities.

In this sense, the regulation of traditional fishing rights in Indian territorial seas is a complex junction of maritime law, fisheries management, environmental protection, and social justice. It is crucial to understand this legal framework for confronting the issues faced by traditional fishermen and for formulating policies that guarantee fair access to maritime resources and ecological sustainability.

Meaning of Traditional Fishing Rights in India

Traditional fishing⁵ rights in India are the customary rights that coastal fishing communities have enjoyed for generations to access and use marine resources for their livelihood. These rights are closely linked to small-scale and artisanal fishing, where fishers rely on non-mechanized or small motorized boats such as canoes, catamarans, and vallams, along with simple fishing gear like nets, hooks, and traps. Unlike large commercial fishing operations, these traditional methods are environmentally sustainable and reflect the communities' deep knowledge of the sea, seasonal fish movements, and coastal ecosystems. More importantly, fishing is not merely a source of income for these communities; it is a way of life that shapes their culture, traditions, social relationships, and identity. Skills, customs, and values associated with fishing are passed down from one generation to another, making traditional fishing rights an essential part of preserving both the livelihoods and the rich cultural heritage of India's coastal communities.

In India, traditional fishing rights are protected not only through customary practices but also through the broader framework of constitutional and fisheries laws. The right to livelihood under Article 21 of the Constitution of India has been interpreted by courts to include the right of traditional fishing communities to pursue their occupation with dignity. Recognising the dependence of these communities on coastal resources, State laws such as the Kerala Marine Fishing Regulation Act, 1980 regulate mechanised fishing and reserve certain nearshore waters for artisanal fishers, helping to reduce conflicts and protect their livelihoods. These legal safeguards, together with long-standing customs and traditional practices, acknowledge that

⁵ Means small-scale, artisanal, or subsistence fishing practices passed down through generations, typically utilizing local knowledge, small boats, and manual tools like nets and handlines

fishing is much more than a means of earning an income it is a way of life that has sustained coastal communities for generations. Protecting traditional fishing rights therefore not only secures the economic well-being of these communities but also preserves their cultural heritage while promoting the sustainable use of marine resources.

Territorial Waters and Fishing Rights

In India, the territorial waters and the rights of fishing are regulated by a mixture of maritime law, fisheries regulations and environmental policies. These are intended to regulate the exploitation of marine resources and at the same time safeguard the livelihoods of coastal communities. Territorial waters The term territorial waters refers to the belt of sea adjacent to the coast over which a coastal state has full sovereignty similar to that over its land territory. In India, the Territorial Waters, Continental Shelf, Exclusive Economic Zone and Other Maritime Zones Act, 1976 defines the extent of territorial waters. It provides that the territorial sea of India extends to a distance of twelve nautical miles from the baseline along the coast. This maritime zone is exclusively reserved for the Indian government to regulate navigation, exploitation of marine resources, environmental protection and fishing activities.

Fishing rights within India's territorial waters are carefully regulated to protect marine resources while ensuring that coastal communities can continue to earn their livelihoods. Although the Central Government determines India's maritime boundaries and lays down the overall legal framework, the day-to-day regulation of fishing activities is mainly the responsibility of coastal State Governments through their respective Marine Fishing Regulation Acts. These laws require fishing vessels to be licensed, regulate the use of fishing gear, enforce seasonal fishing bans to allow fish stocks to replenish, and reserve nearshore waters for traditional and small-scale fishermen by restricting mechanised fishing in these areas. Such measures not only promote sustainable fishing practices and conserve marine biodiversity but also reduce conflicts between traditional and commercial fishers. Ultimately, the legal framework seeks to balance the responsible use of marine resources with the need to protect the livelihoods, rights, and long-standing way of life of India's coastal fishing communities.

Role of State Fisheries Laws

State fisheries laws are important in regulating fishing activities and protecting the interests of fishing communities in the territorial waters of India. Although the central government defines maritime zones and sovereignty over territorial waters through the Territorial Waters, Continental Shelf, Exclusive Economic Zone and Other Maritime Zones Act, 1976⁶, the responsibility for regulating marine fishing activities within these waters is largely entrusted to coastal state governments. To effectively manage fisheries resources and prevent conflicts among fishermen, most coastal states have enacted Marine Fishing Regulation Act 1980. These laws provide a legal framework for controlling fishing operations, issuing licenses to fishing vessels, regulating fishing gear, and enforcing conservation measures to ensure sustainable use of marine resources.

State fisheries laws also play an important role in protecting traditional fishermen from competition with large mechanized fishing vessels. For example, the Kerala Marine Fishing Regulation Act, 1980 and the Tamil Nadu Marine Fishing Regulation Act, 1983 protect the interests of traditional and small-scale fishermen by reserving certain nearshore fishing areas exclusively for their use and restricting mechanised trawlers from entering these zones. This helps traditional fishers continue their livelihood without the risk of losing their catch or having their fishing nets damaged by larger vessels. It also reduces conflicts between different groups of fishermen and ensures fair access to coastal marine resources. In addition, these laws allow State Governments to impose seasonal bans on mechanised fishing during the breeding season, giving fish population's time to recover and helping maintain the ecological balance of the marine environment. By protecting both marine resources and the rights of traditional fishing communities, these regulations promote sustainable fisheries while preserving a way of life that has been passed down through generations.

Beyond regulating fishing activities, State Governments play an important role in supporting the everyday lives of fishing communities. Through their Fisheries Departments, they oversee fishing operations, register fishing vessels, conduct inspections, and ensure that fisheries laws are followed effectively. At the same time, they implement a range of welfare programmes aimed at improving the safety, income, and living conditions of fishermen and their families. These initiatives include support for social security, insurance, housing, training, and modern fishing

⁶ An Act to provide for certain matters relating to the territorial waters continental shelf, exclusive economic zone and other maritime zones of India

infrastructure. By combining regulation with welfare measures, State fisheries laws help protect marine resources, encourage sustainable fishing practices, and ensure that traditional fishing communities

dignity while
and way of

State/UT-wise details of the fishermen population in the country	
States/UTs	Fishermen Population
Andhra Pradesh	14,96,688
Arunachal Pradesh	24,015
Assam	25,24,106
Bihar	60,27,375
Chhattisgarh	2,20,355
Goa	10,545
Gujarat	5,58,691
Haryana	1,18,455
Himachal Pradesh	11,806
Jharkhand	1,40,897
Karnataka	9,74,277
Kerala	10,44,361
Madhya Pradesh	22,32,822
Maharashtra	15,18,228
Manipur	47,711
Meghalaya	16,567

can continue their occupation with preserving their cultural heritage life for future generations

Mizoram	6,289
Nagaland	7,958
Odisha	15,17,574
Punjab	7,591
Rajasthan	57,260
Sikkim	581
Tamil Nadu	12,83,751
Telangana	8,62,221
Tripura	7,761
Uttarakhand	8,352
Uttar Pradesh	39,00,005
West Bengal	32,36,261
A&N Islands	25,941
Chandigarh	524
Dadra & N. H. and Daman & Diu	40,106
Delhi	3,346
Jammu & Kashmir	17,396
Ladakh	22
Lakshadweep	6,518
Puducherry	1,07,272

All India	2,80,63,538
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***Fishermen Statistics in India**

The total number of traditional fishermen in India is estimated to be around 10 to 12 million. These fishermen primarily rely on small-scale, artisanal, and subsistence fishing methods and form the majority of the country's fishing community. They are predominantly located along the eastern, western, and southern coastlines, as well as in inland water bodies such as lakes and rivers. Traditional fishermen typically use simple gear like nets, traps, and small boats, engaging in their activities on a daily or seasonal basis. They constitute approximately 70 to 80 percent of India's total fishing population, which is estimated to be around 14 to 15 million. This community plays a vital role in India's fisheries sector, providing livelihoods to millions and contributing significantly to local food security and economy.

Constitutional Protection of Fishermen's Livelihood in India

The livelihood of fishermen in India is closely connected with the constitutional guarantee of the right to life and livelihood⁷ under Article 21⁸ of the Constitution. Although the Constitution does not explicitly mention fishermen or fishing rights, the judiciary has interpreted the right to life broadly to include the right to live with dignity and the right to pursue a lawful occupation. For coastal communities, fishing is not merely an economic activity but the primary source of subsistence, employment, and cultural identity. Therefore, access to marine resources and coastal waters is essential for ensuring their socio-economic survival. Any governmental action or policy that restricts access to fishing grounds may directly affect the livelihood of fishermen and must therefore satisfy the principles of fairness, reasonableness, and public interest under constitutional law.

In addition to Article 21, Article 19(1)(g)⁹ of the Constitution of India guarantees all citizens the fundamental right to practice any profession or to carry on any occupation, trade, or business. The Fishing, being a traditional occupation of many coastal communities, falls within the scope of this constitutional protection. However, the state may impose reasonable restrictions on this right in the interest of the general public, including for the purpose of conserving marine resources and maintaining ecological balance. As a result, laws regulating fishing activities such as licensing systems, seasonal bans, and restrictions on mechanized fishing are considered

⁷ *Olga Tellis v. Bombay Municipal Corporation*, (1985) 3 SCC 545

⁸ INDIA CONST. art. 21.

⁹ Constitution of India, 1950, art 19(1)(g): "to practice any profession, or to carry on any occupation, trade or business"

constitutionally valid so long as they are aimed at sustainable resource management and do not arbitrarily deprive traditional fishermen of their livelihood.

The Directive Principles of State Policy also support the protection of fishermen's livelihoods by emphasizing social justice and equitable distribution of resources. The Articles such as Article 39(b)¹⁰ encourage the state to ensure that the ownership and control of material resources are distributed in a manner that serves the common good. In the context of fisheries, this principle reflects the idea that marine resources should be shared fairly and should not be dominated by large commercial fishing operators at the cost of traditional and small-scale fishermen. To uphold this principle, many coastal States have enacted fisheries laws that reserve nearshore waters for traditional fishers and restrict mechanised vessels from operating in these areas. These measures help ensure that communities who have depended on the sea for generations continue to have access to the resources that sustain their livelihoods.

The judiciary has also strengthened the constitutional protection available to fishing communities. Indian courts have repeatedly held that while development projects, industrial activities, and environmental regulations are important, they should not deprive fishing communities of their means of livelihood without proper safeguards. At the same time, the courts have recognised that protecting marine ecosystems is equally essential for the long-term survival of fisheries. Thus, the law seeks to strike a fair balance between conserving the marine environment and protecting the livelihood, dignity, and traditional way of life of coastal fishing communities, ensuring that both people and marine resources can thrive together.

Environmental Regulations Affecting Fishing Rights

Environmental laws have an important influence on fishing rights and fisheries management in India. Their primary aim is to protect marine ecosystems, conserve biodiversity, and ensure that coastal resources remain healthy for future generations. However, these regulations also have a direct impact on fishing communities, particularly traditional and small-scale fishers whose lives and livelihoods are closely connected to the sea. For them, the sea is not only a source of income but also a part of their culture and identity. Therefore, while environmental protection is essential, it should be implemented in a way that does not unfairly affect those who depend on

¹⁰ Constitution of India, 1950, art 39(b): "ownership and control of material resources sub serve the common good."

marine resources for their survival. The real challenge is to strike a fair balance between conserving the marine environment and safeguarding the livelihood, rights, and traditional way of life of coastal fishing communities.

One of the most significant environmental laws affecting fishing activities in India is the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986¹¹. Enacted to protect and improve the environment, the Act gives the Central Government wide powers to safeguard coastal and marine ecosystems from pollution and environmental degradation. It allows the Government to regulate industrial activities, control the discharge of pollutants into the sea, and oversee coastal development that could harm marine biodiversity. Although the Act does not deal specifically with fishing, its provisions help preserve the health of marine habitats where fish breed and grow. For traditional fishing communities, a clean and healthy marine environment is essential for sustaining their livelihoods. Thus, by protecting coastal ecosystems and reducing environmental damage, the Act not only supports marine conservation but also helps ensure that future generations of fishermen can continue to depend on the sea for their livelihood.

Another important environmental law that has a direct impact on fishing rights in India is the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972¹². The Act aims to conserve wildlife, including several marine species, by protecting ecologically sensitive habitats and empowering the Government to establish Marine Protected Areas, such as national parks and wildlife sanctuaries. To protect these fragile ecosystems and endangered species, fishing may be restricted or even prohibited within such areas. While these measures are essential for preserving marine biodiversity, they can also affect the livelihoods of traditional fishing communities that have relied on these waters for generations. Therefore, conservation efforts should be implemented in a way that balances the need to protect marine ecosystems with the rights, livelihoods, and traditional way of life of coastal fishing communities.

While such measures are important for biodiversity conservation, they sometimes create conflicts with local fishing communities who have traditionally depended on these areas for fishing.

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¹² An Act to provide for the protection of wild animals, birds and plants and for matters connected therewith or ancillary or incidental thereto with a view to ensuring the ecological and environmental security of the country.

Coastal environmental regulations also play a crucial role in governing fishing rights. The Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ¹³) framework introduced under environmental laws regulates development activities along the coastline to protect coastal ecosystems such as mangroves, coral reefs, and estuaries. To restrict harmful industrial and construction activities near the coast, these regulations help preserve marine habitats that are essential for fish breeding and reproduction. At the same time, the implementation of coastal protection measures must take into account the traditional rights and livelihood needs of fishermen who rely on access to coastal areas.

Environmental regulations also address the problem of destructive fishing practices that can damage marine ecosystems. Activities such as the use of explosives, toxic substances, and certain types of trawling gear can lead to the depletion of fish stocks and destruction of marine habitats. Laws and regulations therefore prohibit such practices to ensure sustainable fisheries management. Ultimately, these restrictions are beneficial to traditional fishers as they help to conserve fish stocks and the long-term productivity of marine resources. But sometimes environmental regulations place restrictions on fishing activities that impact the livelihood of coastal communities. Restrictions on fishing zones, seasonal bans and conservation can reduce fishing opportunities for small-scale fishermen. So, quite often participatory governance is required, where fishing communities are involved in the decision-making process regarding conservation policies. Such an approach helps to implement the environmental protection measures in an ecologically effective and socially equitable way.

Challenges in the Protection of Traditional Fishing Rights

The protection of traditional fishing rights in India faces several legal, economic, and environmental challenges despite the existence of various regulatory frameworks. Often, traditional fishermen with their small boats, simple gear and generations of indigenous knowledge struggle to compete with mechanized fishing vessels. These bigger vessels are equipped with modern technology, powerful engines, and sophisticated navigation systems which enable them to harvest fish on a much larger scale and in a shorter period of time. In this way traditional fishers often suffer declining catches, less income and growing economic insecurity.

¹³ Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Coastal Regulation Zone Notification 2019 (India)

One huge problem is the ongoing battle between mechanized trawlers and traditional fishermen in coastal waters. State fisheries laws designate certain coastal areas for traditional and artisanal fishing, but mechanized vessels routinely enter these zones in search of bigger catches. Such illegal encroachments not only deprive the small-scale fishermen of fish but also destroy their fishing nets and other equipment causing huge financial losses. Such conflicts have become commonplace in many coastal areas, and continue to threaten the livelihoods of traditional fishing communities.

Another major challenge to traditional fishing rights is the overexploitation of marine resources due to the increasing demand for fish and the expansion of commercial fishing activities. Excessive fishing and the use of destructive fishing methods have reduced fish stocks, making it difficult for small-scale fishermen who depend on nearshore waters to earn a sustainable livelihood.

Environmental degradation has further worsened the situation. Pollution from industrial waste, oil spills, plastic debris, and coastal development projects damages marine ecosystems and reduces fish availability. As a result, traditional fishing communities face declining incomes and greater economic insecurity. The Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 provides the legal framework for controlling pollution and protecting marine ecosystems. However, weak implementation and inadequate monitoring often limit its effectiveness. Stronger enforcement and greater participation of fishing communities in environmental conservation are essential to ensure both sustainable fisheries and the protection of traditional fishing rights.

Climate change has become a growing threat to traditional fisheries. Rising sea temperatures, changing ocean currents, and frequent extreme weather events have affected fish migration and reduced fishing opportunities for small-scale fishermen. Coastal erosion and sea-level rise have also damaged fishing villages and infrastructure, making the lives of fishing communities more difficult. These changes have increased the vulnerability of traditional fishermen and affected their livelihood security. Therefore, effective climate adaptation measures, disaster preparedness, and sustainable fisheries management are essential to protect both marine resources and the welfare of traditional fishing communities.

Legal and administrative challenges also limit the effective protection of traditional fishing rights. Many fishermen are unaware of the legal safeguards available to them, while weak enforcement, inadequate monitoring, and poor coordination between central and state authorities reduce the effectiveness of fisheries laws. In addition, policies that promote deep-sea and commercial fishing often give greater importance to economic growth than to the livelihood concerns of traditional fishermen. As a result, existing inequalities within the fishing sector continue to persist.

Role of Community Participation and Sustainable Fisheries Governance

Community participation is critical for the effective governance and sustainable management of fisheries resources, especially in coastal areas where traditional fishing communities depend heavily on marine ecosystems for their livelihoods. In India, traditional knowledge of artisanal fishers about marine biodiversity, seasonal fishing and sustainable harvesting practices is widespread. Such knowledge, when recognized and integrated into fisheries governance, can lead to substantial improvements in resource management while protecting the rights of coastal communities to their livelihoods.

Sustainable fisheries governance requires a participatory approach with cooperation of fishermen, local institutions and government authorities in decision-making processes. In community-based management systems, fishermen are involved in developing and implementing fisheries regulations, including decisions on fishing seasons, conservation measures and fishing gear use. These participatory frameworks not only guarantee regulatory compliance but also foster ownership among local communities concerning marine resource conservation.

Some coastal states in India have created fishermen's cooperatives and local fisheries councils to enhance community participation in fisheries governance. These bodies help in making decisions together, providing financial aid to fishermen, and acting as a link between fishing communities and government officials. These bodies empower local communities, helping to ensure that fisheries policies are responsive to the socio-economic realities of traditional fishers.

Community participation is essential for the long-term conservation of marine resources. Traditional fishermen have protected the sea for generations through their knowledge of fish breeding seasons, fishing grounds, and sustainable fishing practices. Their active involvement in

protecting breeding areas, observing seasonal fishing bans, and discouraging destructive fishing methods plays an important role in maintaining healthy marine ecosystems.

At the international level, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) emphasises the need for the conservation and sustainable use of marine living resources. It encourages coastal States to adopt responsible fisheries management practices and to involve local communities in decisions affecting marine resources.

However, meaningful community participation in India is still affected by several challenges, including limited legal awareness, weak institutional support, and inadequate representation of traditional fishermen in fisheries governance. Strengthening fishermen's cooperatives, improving legal literacy, and recognising the value of traditional ecological knowledge alongside modern scientific methods can help build a more inclusive and sustainable fisheries management system that protects both marine resources and the livelihoods of fishing communities.

The **Traditional Fishermen (Protection and Welfare) Bill, 2023**¹⁴ represents an important effort to strengthen the rights and welfare of traditional fishing communities in India. It recognises that traditional fishermen are not merely workers in the fisheries sector but communities whose livelihood, culture, and identity are closely connected with the sea. At a time when they face increasing challenges from commercial fishing, coastal development, and environmental changes, the Bill seeks to provide them with greater legal protection and social security.

One of the key proposals is the establishment of a National Traditional Fishermen Welfare Authority to coordinate policies and programmes for the welfare and development of traditional fishermen. The Bill also provides for a dedicated welfare fund to support healthcare, insurance, pensions, educational assistance, and financial relief for fishermen and their families. In addition, it seeks to protect their traditional fishing rights by ensuring continued access to customary fishing grounds and by reducing the risk of displacement caused by large-scale industrial and commercial projects.

¹⁴ Kishan, Ravi (2023) The traditional fishermen (Protection and Welfare) bill, 2023. Lok Sabha, New Delhi.

Overall, the Bill reflects a people-centred approach to fisheries governance. It seeks to improve the quality of life of traditional fishermen by protecting their livelihood, strengthening their social security, and recognising their valuable contribution to the sustainable development of India's fisheries sector.

Conclusion

The regulation of traditional fishing rights in Indian territorial waters is essential for protecting the livelihoods of coastal communities while ensuring the sustainable use of marine resources. Traditional fishermen have depended on nearshore marine ecosystems for generations, and their fishing practices are closely linked with cultural traditions and ecological knowledge. However, increasing mechanization, overfishing, coastal development, and environmental degradation have created significant challenges for these communities. Therefore, a strong and balanced legal framework is necessary to regulate fishing activities and safeguard the interests of traditional fishermen.

India has established a legal structure to manage fisheries through national and state-level laws. Legislation such as the Territorial Waters, Continental Shelf, Exclusive Economic Zone and Other Maritime Zones Act, 1976 defines India's maritime jurisdiction and empowers the state to regulate marine resources within territorial waters. Further, coastal states regulate fishing zones, licensing, and mechanized vessels through their Marine Fishing Regulation Acts as part of fisheries management. The purpose of these laws is to protect artisanal fishers from unfair competition and to promote sustainable fishing practices. The constitutional framework of India also indirectly supports the protection of livelihood of fishermen. The Supreme Court of India in cases like *Olga Tellis v. Bombay Municipal Corporation*¹⁵ has held that the right to life under Article 21 includes the right to livelihood as a part of the fundamental rights. This interpretation strengthens the legal foundation for the protection of traditional fishing communities' economic activity.

In conclusion, effective legal regulation of traditional fishing rights must balance economic development, environmental conservation, and social justice. Strengthening community participation, improving enforcement mechanisms, and adopting sustainable fisheries

¹⁵ (1985) 3 S.C.C. 545

management practices will help ensure that traditional fishing communities continue to thrive while preserving marine resources for future generations