5. India's Seafood Export - Economy

India's marine products exports increased by 16% in terms of value and 12% in volume during the first seven months (April-October) of FY 2025-26 as compared to the corresponding period last fiscal

India's Position in Global Seafood Trade

Current Status and Export Performance - India's seafood exports rose from USD 4.19 billion (April–October 2024) to USD 4.87 billion (April–October 2025), indicating robust sectoral momentum. Export growth has been driven by successful market diversification, with notable increases in shipments to Vietnam, Belgium, Malaysia, Germany, and China. Although exports to the United States declined (4% in value and 11% in volume), it continues to be India's largest single market, underlining its strategic importance. India is the second-largest producer of fish and aquaculture products globally and among the world's leading shrimp producers, particularly farmed shrimp.

Structural Strengths of India's Seafood Sector - Vast coastline of over 7,500 km, extensive inland water resources, and favourable tropical climate. Strong aquaculture base, especially in shrimp, freshwater fish, and brackish water species. Competitive labour costs and growing private-sector participation in processing and exports.

Key Reasons Behind the Export Boost

Rising Global Demand - Global dietary shifts towards protein-rich, low-fat, and nutrient-dense foods have boosted seafood consumption. Strong demand from major markets such as the USA, European Union, Japan, China, and Southeast Asia. Shrimp remains the largest contributor to India's seafood exports due to high international demand and price realisation.

Diversification of Export Markets - Strategic reduction of over-dependence on the US market, lowering vulnerability to tariff and regulatory shocks. Expansion into West Asia, Africa, Latin America, and East Asia, enhancing export resilience. Market diversification has helped India absorb demand fluctuations and geopolitical trade disruptions.

Government Policy and Institutional Support - Implementation of Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY)

1. Development of fishing harbours, cold storage, ice plants, and processing infrastructure
2. Promotion of sustainable and modern aquaculture practices
3. Support for fishers, fish farmers, and fisheries cooperatives

Emphasis on formalisation of the fisheries sector and improved access to credit and insurance.

Improved Quality, Safety, and Traceability - Adoption of international food safety standards, including HACCP and EU compliance norms. Strengthening of traceability systems to meet importing countries' regulatory requirements. Better compliance with Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) measures, enhancing India's credibility in premium markets.

Growth in Aquaculture - Rapid expansion of shrimp aquaculture, particularly in coastal states such as Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Odisha, and West Bengal. Gradual shift from capture fisheries to culture fisheries, reducing pressure on overexploited marine stocks. Increasing use of technology-driven aquaculture, including biofloc systems and disease management protocols.

Importance of the Seafood Sector

Foreign Exchange Earnings- Seafood exports significantly support India's trade balance.

Livelihood Security- Fisheries and aquaculture employ millions of people, making it the second-largest employment generator after agriculture.

Nutritional Security- Fish provides affordable, high-quality protein and essential micronutrients to large sections of the population.

Blue Economy Vision- The seafood sector is a central pillar of India's Blue Economy, integrating economic growth with marine sustainability.

Key Challenges

1. Low Value Addition- A large share of exports is in raw or minimally processed form, limiting profitability and global branding.
2. Trade Barriers- High tariffs in the US and stringent quality and environmental standards in Europe.
3. Environmental Stress- Overfishing, habitat degradation, coastal pollution, and climate change threaten marine ecosystems.
4. Infrastructure Gaps- Inadequate cold chains, logistics bottlenecks, and shortage of modern processing facilities.
5. Governance Issues- Fragmented policies, overlapping regulations, and lack of uniform standards across states.

Conclusion and Way Forward

India's seafood industry has achieved global scale and recognition, but sustaining growth requires a strategic shift from volume-led to value-led exports. Priority actions include-

1. Expanding value addition and processing capacity
2. Investing in cold chain and export logistics
3. Strengthening sustainable fishing and aquaculture practices
4. Enhancing market diversification and branding of Indian seafood

A balanced approach integrating economic growth, ecological sustainability, and social inclusion will be critical to building a resilient and responsible seafood economy aligned with India's long-term Blue Economy goals.

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