

Transport norms relaxed for small fishermen across border

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PANAJI: Small traditional fishermen from Maharashtra and Karnataka, within a radius of 60km from the Goa border, got some relief with the public health department issuing an order on Monday relaxing the directorate of food and drugs administration (FDA) guidelines for fish import. They will be allowed to sell their fish to traders in Goa provided they transport their catch on light motor vehicles in insulated boxes or with adequate ice.

The state government had been under intense pressure during the last two months after the FDA laid down strict guidelines banning fish that was not transported in insulated vehicles and without transporter's license issued by the FDA of the state of import.

Earlier this month, Karnataka chief minister H D Kumaraswamy had written to Goa government seeking relaxation in FDA guidelines stating that fishermen in his state, who export fish to Goa, were badly affected by the ban. The Karnataka government had also sought adequate time to comply with Goa FDA directives.

Representatives of small fishermen from both the neighbouring states had also met health minister Vishwajit Rane seeking relief. Rane had assured them of working out a solution within the parameters of the FDA guidelines.

The health minister said that conditional relief has been allowed only to the traditional fishermen to ensure there is no violation of FDA guidelines.

Transportation, Rane said, may be done in light motor vehicles, but usage of insulated boxes to carry the fish consignment, at the very least adequate quantities of ice, were a must.

The order also stated that fish, so brought into the state, had to pass safety norms prescribed by the Food Safety and Standard Authority of India, and would be subjected to

random checks by FDA officials using the rapid kit developed by the Central Institute of Fisheries Technology (CIFT).

If any of the fish samples test positive for formaldehyde, the consignment would held back and further subjected to confirmatory laboratory testing, based on the result of which, action as per the Food Safety and Standards Act would be taken, the order stated.

Irrespective of the relaxation, the small tradition fishermen are required to have the necessary licence from their FDA concerned, the order added, clarifying that this relaxation was not applicable to bigger trucks and other heavy vehicles carrying fish into Goa.