

A Closer Look at Bangladesh's 65-Day Marine Fishing Ban

Afifat Khanam Ritika



The marine community knows that a 65-day ban on all types of fishing in the sea, including Hilsa, has been started from May 20 to July 23 this year to ensure the proper reproduction, production, and preservation of marine resources. Due to curiosity, I have started to explore the significance of the 65-day fishing ban period introduced in Bangladesh in 2015; I came across an intriguing observation: the growth rates appeared to decline after the ban was implemented, contrary to what was expected from this management strategy. This finding led me to question the effectiveness of relying solely on a 65-day ban without addressing the internal challenges that might hinder the desired outcomes.

Just think carefully, in 2015, marine fish production stood at approximately 6 lakh metric tons, a figure that rose to 6.5 by 2022, reflecting a growth rate of 8.33% over eight years. However, taking into account the preceding eight-year period from 2008 to 2015, before the imposition of the ban, fish production had surged from 4.9 lakh metric tons in 2008 to 6 lakh metric tons in 2015, representing a staggering growth rate of 22.44%.

Period	Consideration Years	Production (Lakh MT)	Growth Rate (%)	Growth rate (GR) Calculation Formula
Before Ban	8 (2008 to 2015)	4.90 to 6.00	+ 22.44 %	GR= (End Value-Starting Value) *100)/ Starting Value
After Ban	8 (2015 to 2022)	6.00 to 6.50	+ 08.33%	

Following the implementation of the fishing ban and completion of a breeding cycle, one would naturally anticipate an upward trajectory in the growth rate. Surprisingly, the findings instead reveal a decline in the growth

rate. Such unexpected results warrant a rigorous scientific investigation to uncover the true factors contributing to this downturn. Without empirical evidence, misconceptions and uncertainties surrounding the reasons behind the diminishing growth rate may persist, preventing us from identifying effective solutions.

Before the ban, Bangladesh experienced extensive overfishing, depleting fish stocks and disrupting marine ecosystems. Consequently, the subsequent growth rate from 2006 to 2014 appeared higher, possibly due to unregulated fishing during that period. During the fishing ban, significant changes might have occurred in fish populations in terms of species composition and abundance. Certain species with slower growth rates or lower reproductive capacities probably became dominant, resulting in an overall decline in the growth rate. Thorough scientific investigations are necessary to comprehend these shifts and their impacts. Ecological factors may also play a crucial role in influencing fish populations and their growth rates. Changes in water temperature, salinity levels, oxygen availability, and food sources can all impact marine species' reproductive and growth patterns. It becomes essential to examine whether any alterations in the ecosystem, whether natural or caused by human activities, have affected the growth rate of marine fish. Environmental degradation, such as pollution and habitat destruction, significantly threatens marine ecosystems. If the fishing ban period coincided with increased pollution levels or habitat degradation, these factors could have negatively impacted fish populations and their growth potential. It is imperative to evaluate the state of the marine environment to identify any detrimental effects.

Additionally, illegal fishing practices may persist despite the fishing ban, undermining recovery efforts. Unauthorised fishing can impede the growth and repopulation of fish species, counteracting the intended benefits of the ban. Strict enforcement measures and severe penalties are necessary to combat illegal fishing effectively. A comprehensive approach is crucial to effectively implement a 65-day marine fishing ban and address the challenges associated with illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing. One key strategy is controlling and preventing IUU fishing activities, coupled with joint ban periods coordinated among coastal nations. These measures work in tandem to ensure the ban's efficacy and maximise its impact on marine conservation. An exemplary model for IUU fishing control is the cooperation among countries in the Pacific region. The Parties to the Nauru Agreement (PNA) is a group of Pacific Island nations that has successfully implemented measures to combat IUU fishing. They established the Vessel Day Scheme, which regulates fishing access through vessel days. This initiative, supported by effective monitoring and surveillance, has significantly reduced IUU fishing activities in the region and contributed to sustainable fisheries management. So, by synchronising their fishing bans in the BoB region, neighbouring countries can prevent vessels from exploiting marine resources in their waters during the designated period. This collective effort reduces the likelihood of fishermen simply moving their operations to neighbouring territories to circumvent the ban. Joint bans also promote regional cooperation and enable sharing of best practices in fisheries management.

In a nutshell, to determine the precise reasons for the declining growth rate of marine fish production, thorough scientific research is imperative. Comprehensive studies on fish populations, ecological surveys and analysis of environmental factors are required to uncover the true causes behind this phenomenon. This scientific evidence is crucial to dispel misconceptions and develop effective strategies for the sustainable management and growth of marine fish populations.

The 65-day marine fishing ban in Bangladesh, with its negative impact on the lives of fishermen, is a double-edged sword, and it represents a challenging period of financial strain and uncertainty. However, it is also an opportunity for personal growth, community resilience, and ecological revival. As the sea continues to ebb and flow, the fishermen and their families navigate the storm, embracing the positive vibrations that emerge from the depths of hardship, emerging stronger and wiser on the other side. Moreover, the ban acts as a reset button, allowing depleted fish stocks to regenerate and reclaim their former glory. Once plundered and exploited, the seas find help in this imposed stillness, embarking on a journey of recovery and restoration.

It is essential to view the post-ban period not solely through the lens of reduced growth rates but also as a time of recalibration and transformation. The fishing ban has provided an opportunity for introspection and exploring sustainable practices. Efforts to promote responsible fishing techniques, raise awareness about marine conservation, and implement stricter regulations have gradually gained traction. These initiatives, albeit in their nascent stages, have the potential to lay the foundation for a more sustainable and resilient fishing industry in the long run.

The writer is a Research Officer, Bangladesh Institute of Maritime Research and Development (BIMRAD)

The article was published in the [daily sun](#) newspaper on Jun 20, 2023