Palk Bay Conflict - Deep Sea Fishing

What is the issue?

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- Tamil Nadu Fisheries University recently organised a one-day workshop on deep sea fishing.
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- There are a range of concerns to be addressed before taking forward the deep sea fishing plan.
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What is the need for new plan?

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- The Palk Bay fishing conflict has figured prominently in high-level meetings between India and Sri Lanka.
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- The main issue is the oversized fleet of Tamil Nadu trawlers that fish regularly in Sri Lankan waters.
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- Trawlers greatly damage the ecosystem and hence are unsustainable way of fishing.
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- The Sri Lankan government recently passed a legislation banning trawling.
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- It is also vigilantly patrolling the International Maritime Boundary Line, capturing Indian trawl boats and fishers.
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- Hence the need for an alternative to bottom trawlers was mandated.
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What is deep sea fishing plan?

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- The water depth should be at least 30 meters to be considered a deep sea fishing territory.
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- The plan aims at promoting deep sea fishing as an alternative to trawling in the Palk Bay.
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- The present plan in the Palk Bay is to extract 2,000 trawlers from the bay and replace them with deep sea vessels.
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- The deep sea vessels cannot trawl or operate in the Palk Bay.
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- The government is now creating a new deep sea fishing harbour at Mookaiyur, south of the Palk Bay in the Gulf of Mannar, where many of these vessels are likely to be berthed.
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- It can also help avoid the risks of cross-border fishing.
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What are the concerns?

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- Due to lack of information on location of oceanic stocks of fishery resources, availability of sufficient stocks in the adjacent waters of the Bay of Bengal and Gulf of Mannar is uncertain.
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- Thus the economic viability of deep sea fishing is not fully established.
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- The operational cost of deep sea fishing is also a concern.
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- The skills and interest of Palk Bay fishers are limited to trawlers and one-day fishing.
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- Shifting to deep sea fishing needs skill upgrade.
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- Till then the fate of work opportunities of existing trawl crews remains largely unaddressed.
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What should be done?

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- The Tamil Nadu Fisheries Department’s have to seriously monitor, control and carry out surveillance (MCS) of the decommissioning process.
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- The government should also ensure that remaining trawl vessels are not upgraded in size or engine horsepower beyond legal limits.
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- Beyond the deep sea vision, other solutions such as buy-backs, alternative livelihoods and skill development need to be rolled out.
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Source: The Hindu

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