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## Deep knowledge

By Jose Joy | Express News Service | Published: 21st December 2017 10:08 PM |  
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**THIRUVANANTHAPURAM:** The wounds of Ockhi remain fresh with the missing persons file still lying open. Authorities have taken flak from the coastal community who bore the brunt of the disastrous storm for the lack of advance-warning and slow rescue operations. Even at this late hour, the officials should consider looking into the working principle of the Thiruvananthapuram-based organisation Friends

of Marine Life.

“Fisherfolk have a great deal of understanding about the marine elements. Yet, proper capacity-building initiatives have not been undertaken to use their skills in policymaking or eco-system conservation,” informs founder Robert Panipilla, whose establishment has been involved in documenting the knowledge of fisherfolk in coordination with the scientific community to utilise it better. A month-old scuba diving programme—focussed on youngsters from the coastal areas—is their latest approach to align marine research and traditional wisdom.



Diving lessons in progress

### A new life

It's not surprising that the team—comprising only of volunteers—decided on training young adults after an RTI revealed that only a negligible minority of Marine scientists working in Kerala know how to dive. “Most studies are conducted in lab environments and completely detached from the natural

habitats. Our understanding of ecologically-sensitive seabed zones are limited and training the fishermen community—who have already identified over 100 regions in Thiruvananthapuram district itself—should definitely aid the studies,” says the 57-year-old, who aims to improve the capacity of citizen scientists through the initiative.

Currently receiving advanced level training—which would equip them to dive beyond 30 metres depth—seashore dwellers can even provide aid during accidents or disasters if imparted with rescue training. Special attention is given to higher secondary students who wish to pursue a passionate career in marine studies.

Presently involving seven youngsters from the Southernmost district, the team is looking forward to collaborations and funding to expand the plan to other areas along Kerala's sprawling coastline.

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