Data and Metadata. 2026; 5:1302
doi: 10.56294/dm20261302

ORIGINAL

IoT and AI for Smart Rural Fishing: System Architecture, TEK Integration, and Economic Viability Analysis

IoT e IA para la pesca rural inteligente: Arquitectura del sistema, integración del conocimiento ecológico tradicional (TEK) y análisis de viabilidad económica

Manoj Krishnan[1], R. Karthik[1]

[1]Department of Computer Science, Sri Krishna Adithya College of Arts and Science. Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India.

Cite as: Krishnan M, Karthik R. IoT and AI for Smart Rural Fishing: System Architecture, TEK Integration, and Economic Viability Analysis. Data and Metadata. 2026; 5:1302. https://doi.org/10.56294/dm20261302

Submitted: 10-08-2025 **Revised:** 15-09-2025 **Accepted:** 10-12-2025 **Published:** 01-01-2026

Editor: Dr. Adrián Alejandro Vitón Castillo

Corresponding Author: Manoj Krishnan

ABSTRACT

Introduction: the integration of IoT and AI technologies presents opportunities for modernizing traditional fishing practices while preserving ecological knowledge.
Objective: this research develops and evaluates an integrated IoT-AI system to enhance traditional Chinese fishing net operations in Kerala backwaters, India, with an emphasis on TEK integration and economic viability assessment.
Method: we deployed an edge-cloud computing architecture integrating 15 environmental sensors, automated winch systems, and cloud-based AI analytics at Chathedam fishing site (9,9674°N, 76,2816°E) over six months (January-June 2025), documenting 1000 fishing operations and validating 20 TEK rules through statistical analysis.
Results: nine high-confidence TEK rules (≥0,80) achieved 100 % validation success with 18-47 % catch improvements. AI-guided operations achieved 10 percentage point improvement in profit margin (70,4 % vs 60,4 %) primarily through cost reduction. System investment of $1,720 achieves payback in 1,8 months with 898 % ROI over 18 months.
Conclusions: the validated edge-cloud architecture, TEK-AI integration framework, and demonstrated economic viability provide a replicable model for technology-enabled enhancement of traditional small-scale fisheries.

Keywords: Internet of Things (IoT); Edge Computing; Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK); Economic Viability; Human-AI Collaboration; Smart Fisheries; Chinese Fishing Nets.

RESUMEN

Introducción: la integración de las tecnologías del IoT y la IA ofrece oportunidades para modernizar las prácticas pesqueras tradicionales, preservando al mismo tiempo el conocimiento ecológico.
Objetivo: esta investigación desarrolla y evalúa un sistema integrado de IoT e IA para mejorar las operaciones de pesca con redes tradicionales chinas en las aguas estancadas de Kerala, India, con énfasis en la integración de la tecnología TEK y la evaluación de la viabilidad económica.
Método: implementamos una arquitectura de computación en la nube que integra 15 sensores ambientales, sistemas de cabrestante automatizados y análisis basados en IA en el centro pesquero de Chathedam (9,9674°N, 76,2816°E) durante seis meses (enero-junio de 2025), documentando 1000 operaciones de pesca y validando 20 reglas TEK mediante análisis estadístico.
Resultados: nueve reglas TEK de alta confianza (≥0,80) lograron un éxito de validación del 100 %, con mejoras en las capturas del 18-47 %. Las operaciones guiadas por IA lograron una mejora de 10 puntos porcentuales

en el margen de beneficio (70,4 % frente a 60,4 %), principalmente mediante la reducción de costes. La inversión en el sistema de $1720 se amortiza en 1,8 meses, con un ROI del 898 % en 18 meses.
Conclusiones: la arquitectura edge-cloud validada, el marco de integración TEK-AI y la viabilidad económica demostrada proporcionan un modelo replicable para la mejora tecnológica de la pesca tradicional en pequeña escala.

Palabras clave: Internet de las Cosas (IoT); Computación Perimetral; Conocimiento Ecológico Tradicional (TEK); Viabilidad Económica; Colaboración Humano-IA; Pesquerías Inteligentes; Redes de Pesca Chinas.

INTRODUCTION

The integration of Internet of Things (IoT) and Artificial Intelligence (AI) presents transformative opportunities for modernizing fishing practices, promising improvements in efficiency, sustainability, and profitability. [1] Small-scale fisheries, which employ over 90 % of the world's capture fishers and contribute significantly to food security, face mounting challenges including resource depletion, unpredictable environmental conditions, and economic instability.[2] Traditional fishing methods, while embodying generations of ecological knowledge, often lack the precision and data-driven decision support that modern technologies can provide.

Traditional Chinese fishing nets (locally known as "Cheena vala" in Kerala, India) represent a unique shore-operated lift net fishing technique dating back to the 14th century.[3] These iconic structures, primarily located in the Kerala backwaters, utilise a large horizontal net suspended from cantilever structures. Despite their cultural significance and tourism value, Chinese fishing net operations face declining profitability due to unpredictable catch rates, labour-intensive manual operation, and a lack of real-time environmental information.[4] Fishermen rely primarily on experiential knowledge and visual observation to determine optimal fishing times, resulting in significant operational inefficiencies.

Recent advances in IoT sensor technologies, edge computing, and machine learning algorithms offer promising solutions for enhancing traditional fishing practices.[5] However, existing research predominantly focuses on industrial-scale commercial fishing operations or aquaculture systems , with limited attention to small-scale, traditional fishing methods in resource-constrained rural communities.[6,7] Moreover, previous studies often treat conventional ecological knowledge (TEK) and modern technology as separate domains, missing opportunities for synergistic integration.[8]

This research addresses these gaps through a complete six-month field deployment at a traditional Chinese fishing net site in Chathedam, Kochi, Kerala, India (9,9674°N, 76,2816°E). We developed and evaluated an integrated IoT-AI system that combines environmental monitoring, sonar-based fish detection, automated winch control, and cloud-based predictive analytics, while explicitly incorporating and validating traditional ecological knowledge.

IoT-Based Fish Detection Systems

IoT-enabled fish detection has emerged as a promising approach to enhance fishing efficiency. Gupta et al. [9] demonstrated a sonar-based system integrated with Arduino microcontrollers for real-time fish localization in inland waters, achieving 72 % detection accuracy. Their "fish object initialization tool" combined echo sounder technology with GPS positioning to map fish distributions. However, this work focused solely on detection without integration into operational fishing systems or economic analysis.

Kim et al.[10] developed an underwater acoustic sensor network for monitoring fish schools in marine environments, utilizing multi-beam sonar arrays with distributed processing. While technically sophisticated, their system required a substantial infrastructure investment ($15 000+), making it unsuitable for small-scale operations. Moreover, their evaluation was limited to detection metrics without assessing impacts on actual fishing outcomes or fisher livelihoods. Our work extends beyond detection to encompass complete operational integration, including automated winch control, decision support, and economic viability assessment specifically designed for traditional fishing methods with investment costs under $2000.

Machine Learning in Fisheries Applications

Recent research has explored machine learning for fisheries management and prediction. Salman et al. [11] applied deep convolutional neural networks for automated fish species classification from underwater video, achieving 94,3 % accuracy across 10 species. While valuable for species monitoring, this approach requires continuous video capture and substantial computational resources.

Time-series forecasting has been applied to the prediction of fisheries catch. Stergiou and Christou compared ARIMA, SARIMA, and neural network models for monthly fisheries catch forecasting in Mediterranean waters, finding that SARIMA models achieved the lowest mean absolute percentage error (12,8 %) when accounting for seasonal patterns.[12] Prista et al.[13] successfully applied SARIMA to data-poor fisheries in Portugal, demonstrating forecasting viability with limited historical data.

However, these studies focused on large-scale commercial fisheries with aggregated catch statistics. Our work addresses the distinct challenge of high-frequency, individual-fishing-event prediction in dynamic estuarine environments, where fish abundance varies dramatically over hours rather than months.

Traditional Ecological Knowledge in Fisheries

Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) has been recognized as valuable for fisheries management, yet few studies have attempted formal integration with modern technology.[14] Silvano and Valbo-Jørgensen documented fisher's ecological knowledge of fish behavior in Brazilian reservoirs, identifying 23 environmental factors fishers use in decision-making.[15] However, this knowledge remained informal and non-quantified.

Brook and McLachlan demonstrated that traditional fishing practices in South African communities incorporated a sophisticated understanding of tidal patterns, moon phases, and weather conditions.[16] Still, they noted these practices were at risk of being lost without documentation. Our work uniquely formalizes TEK into computable rules and validates them through statistical analysis, demonstrating their scientific validity and facilitating preservation and transmission of traditional knowledge.

A robust theoretical model provides a structured understanding of complex phenomena and enables systematic hypothesis testing.[18] This research integrates three established theoretical perspectives. Socio-Technical Systems Theory conceptualises fishing operation as comprising interdependent technological and social components that mutually shape one another, which informs our emphasis on TEK integration rather than technology imposition while maintaining fisher agency.[19] IoT Architecture Theory provides the structural foundation through a four-layer framework encompassing perception, network, processing, and application layers, which we extend through a hybrid edge-cloud model optimized for resource-constrained environments with intermittent connectivity.[20] Human-AI Collaboration Theory implements complementary intelligence principles where AI handles quantitative pattern recognition across 15 environmental parameters while fishers provide contextual judgment and retain final decision authority.[21]

Figure 1 visualizes our integrated conceptual model synthesizing these perspectives into five interdependent components: environmental sensing, edge computing, cloud analytics, traditional knowledge formalization, and economic feedback.

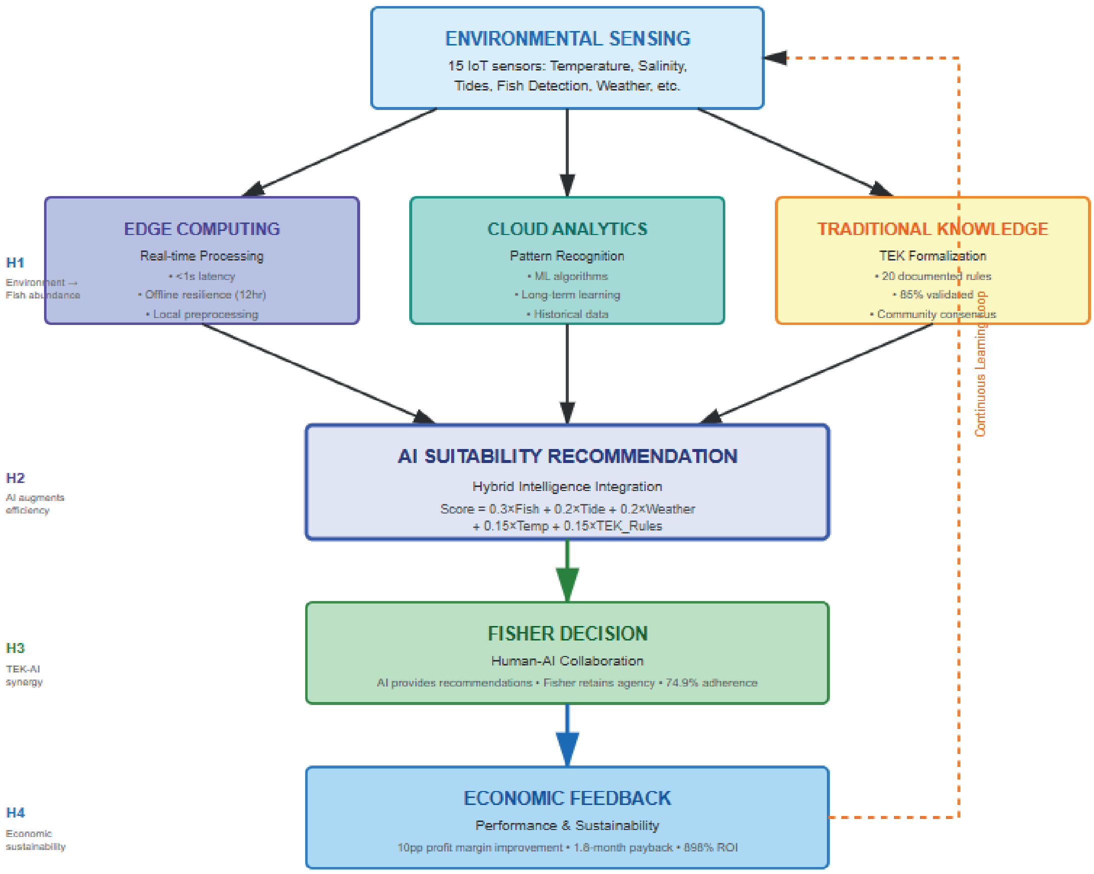

Figure 1. Conceptual model framework

The model generates four testable hypotheses: environmental conditions correlate positively with fish abundance (H1), AI-guided decisions improve operational efficiency compared to traditional judgment alone (H2), TEK integration enhances AI prediction accuracy and fisher acceptance (H3), and system ROI enables long-term adoption for resource-constrained fishermen (H4).

Research Objectives

The primary objectives of this research are:

1. System Development: design and implement a scalable IoT-AI architecture integrating environmental sensors, sonar fish detection, edge computing devices, automated winch systems, and cloud-based analytics optimized for traditional Chinese fishing net operations.
2. TEK-AI Integration: document, formalize, and scientifically validate traditional ecological knowledge rules through statistical analysis of operational data, demonstrating how traditional wisdom and modern analytics can be synergistically combined.
3. Economic Viability Assessment: conduct rigorous cost-benefit analysis to evaluate the economic feasibility of IoT/AI technology adoption for small-scale fishermen, including system investment costs, operational savings, and return on investment.
4. Performance Evaluation: compare fishing outcomes, operational efficiency, and economic performance between AI-guided and traditional decision-making approaches.

Research Gaps

Despite these advances, significant gaps remain in this field. Existing research predominantly focuses on individual components such as detection, prediction, or monitoring without achieving full operational integration that includes automated control systems. Furthermore, few studies conduct rigorous cost-benefit analysis indicating economic viability for small-scale fishermen in developing regions, leaving critical questions about affordability and return on investment unanswered. Another persistent limitation is that traditional knowledge and modern technology are typically treated as separate domains without formal integration frameworks, missing opportunities for synergistic combination. Finally, most systems reported in the literature are evaluated in controlled environments or through simulation rather than extended field deployments with active fisher participation, limiting understanding of real-world performance and adoption dynamics.

Our research addresses these gaps through a complete six-month field deployment with an integrated hardware-software system, detailed economic analysis, formal TEK validation, and creation of a multi-modal open dataset.

Problem Formulation

Rural fishing in Kerala backwaters using traditional Chinese fishing nets remains highly manual, labour-intensive, and economically uncertain. Fishermen lack access to:

1. Real-time environmental data: water temperature, salinity, tide levels, turbidity, and current speed that influence fish behavior.
2. Fish abundance information: reliable detection of fish presence and density below fishing nets.
3. Decision support: data-driven recommendations on optimal fishing times versus traditional judgment alone.
4. Operational efficiency: manual net operation requires 3-5 workers and 45-60 minutes per fishing cycle.
5. Economic transparency: lack of systematic cost-revenue tracking prevents optimization.

These limitations result in Fishing during low-probability periods (wasted effort and fuel), missed optimal fishing windows (lost catch opportunities), High labour costs relative to catch value, Inability to adapt to changing environmental conditions, Economic uncertainty and declining fisher livelihoods.

METHOD

Research Approach

Following a mixed-method approach, this research addressed four primary objectives. First, we designed and implemented a scalable IoT-AI architecture integrating environmental sensors, sonar-based fish detection, edge computing devices, automated winch systems, and cloud-based analytics, optimised for traditional Chinese fishing net operations.[17] Second, we documented, formalized, and scientifically validated traditional ecological knowledge rules through statistical analysis of operational data, demonstrating how traditional wisdom and modern analytics can be synergistically combined. Third, we conducted a rigorous cost-benefit analysis to evaluate the economic feasibility of IoT/AI technology adoption for small-scale fishermen, including system investment costs, operational savings, and return on investment. Fourth, we compared fishing outcomes, operational efficiency, and economic performance between AI-guided and traditional decision-making approaches.

Study Site and Duration

- Location: Chathedam fishing village, Fort Kochi, Kerala, India.
- Geographic Coordinates: 9,9674°N, 76,2816°E.
- Ecosystem: Vembanad backwater estuarine system.
- Study Duration: January 1 - June30, 2025(6 months).
- Study Period Characteristics: Covered winter monsoon transition (Jan-Feb), pre-monsoon (Mar-May), and early monsoon (June).

The Chathedam site was selected due to the presence of active traditional Chinese fishing net operations, community willingness to participate, accessibility for equipment installation and maintenance, representative of typical Kerala backwater conditions, and a stable fishing community with experienced practitioners for TEK documentation.

Data Collection Methodology

Environmental Sensor Deployment

A comprehensive sensor array was deployed at the fishing net site, comprising:

- Sonar System: lucky FF1108-1 wireless fish finder (0,6-36m depth range, 200kHz frequency, 45° beam angle)
- Water Temperature: DS18B20 digital sensor (±0,5°C accuracy, -55 to +125°C range)
- Salinity: analog conductivity sensor (0-50 ppt range, ±0,5 ppt accuracy)
- Tide Level: HC-SR04 ultrasonic distance sensor (2-400cm range, ±3mm accuracy) mounted on fixed structure.
- Current Speed: hall effect flow sensor (0-2 m/s range)
- Turbidity: SEN0189 turbidity sensor (0-3000 NTU)
- Weather Station: davis Vantage Pro2 for ambient conditions
- Sampling Frequency: all sensors sampled at 15-minute intervals, synchronized via NTP time protocol.
- Data Transmission: sensors interfaced with a Raspberry Pi 4 Model B (4GB RAM) edge device, which performed local preprocessing and transmitted aggregated data to a Firebase cloud database via a 4G LTE connection.

Fishing Event Documentation

For each fishing operation, we recorded:

- Start and end timestamps.
- Environmental conditions at deployment (from sensor data)
- AI system recommendation (fish/wait/maybe) with confidence score
- Fisher's actual decision (followed the recommendation or used traditional judgment)
- Catch outcome: species, quantity, weight, and quality assessment.
- Economic data: market price, operating costs (fuel, labor), revenue, and profit
- Fisher rationale for the decision (brief interview)
- Total Events Documented: 1000 fishing operations over 6 months.

Traditional Ecological Knowledge Documentation

TEK documentation involved

Traditional ecological knowledge documentation employed a multi-method qualitative approach combining semi-structured interviews, participatory observation, focus group discussions, and systematic knowledge formalization. Participant sampling followed purposive selection criteria, targeting fishermen with at least 15 years of experience operating Chinese fishing nets in the Chathedam fishing community. From 32 eligible fishermen identified through the local fishing cooperative registry, 20 agreed to participate, yielding a response rate of 62,5 %. This sample size was determined by data saturation principles, with recruitment continuing until no new knowledge categories emerged from subsequent interviews. Participants ranged from 15 to 45 years of fishing experience, ensuring representation of both mid-career practitioners and senior knowledge holders.

Semi-structured interviews explored four primary knowledge domains. Participants were asked to describe environmental signs that indicate favorable fishing conditions, explain how tidal patterns, lunar phases, and weather phenomena influence their fishing decisions, share knowledge transmitted from elder fishermen regarding optimal fishing times, and identify conditions under which they typically avoid fishing operations. Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes and was conducted in Malayalam, the local language, to

https://doi.org/10.56294/dm20261302 ISSN: 2953-4917

ensure accurate knowledge capture.

Participatory observation complemented interview data through three months of intensive researcher presence during fishing operations. This ethnographic component enabled direct observation of decision-making processes, informal knowledge sharing among fishermen, and practical application of traditional rules in real-time operational contexts. The researcher documented verbal cues, gestural indicators, and contextual factors that fishermen referenced when making fishing decisions but did not explicitly articulate during formal interviews.

Community validation occurred through four focus group discussions, each comprising 8 to 12 participants representing the active fishing community's demographic composition. These sessions presented documented knowledge back to the community, facilitated discussion of agreement and disagreement levels among participants, and resolved ambiguities in individual interview responses. Consensus levels from focus group discussions informed the confidence scores assigned to each TEK rule.

The final phase involved formalising systematic knowledge, translating traditional narrative knowledge into structured if-then rules with explicit condition logic, predicted outcomes, and confidence scores derived from community agreement levels. This formalization process enabled computational integration of TEK into the AI recommendation system while preserving the essential content of traditional wisdom.

Ethical Considerations

This research was approved by the Institutional Ethics Committee of Sri Krishna Adithya College of Arts and Science (Approval Reference: SKASC/IEC/2024/08). All participants provided written informed consent. The local fishing cooperative provided community-level approval. Economic data was anonymised to protect individual fishers privacy. Participants were informed they could withdraw at any time without penalty. The research team committed to sharing findings with the community and ensuring any technological benefits would be accessible.

System Architecture and Design

The system architecture integrates five primary components:

1. Connected IoT Sensors: environmental and sonar monitoring.
2. Edge/Raspberry Pi Devices: local processing and control.
3. Cloud-Based AI Platform: pattern recognition and prediction.
4. Electrical Winch System: automated net operation.
5. Community Engagement Layer: user interface and feedback.

Data Flow: Sensors → Raspberry Pi (edge processing) → Firebase Cloud (storage/AI analysis) → Control signals → Winch actuation → Catch outcomes → Feedback loop.

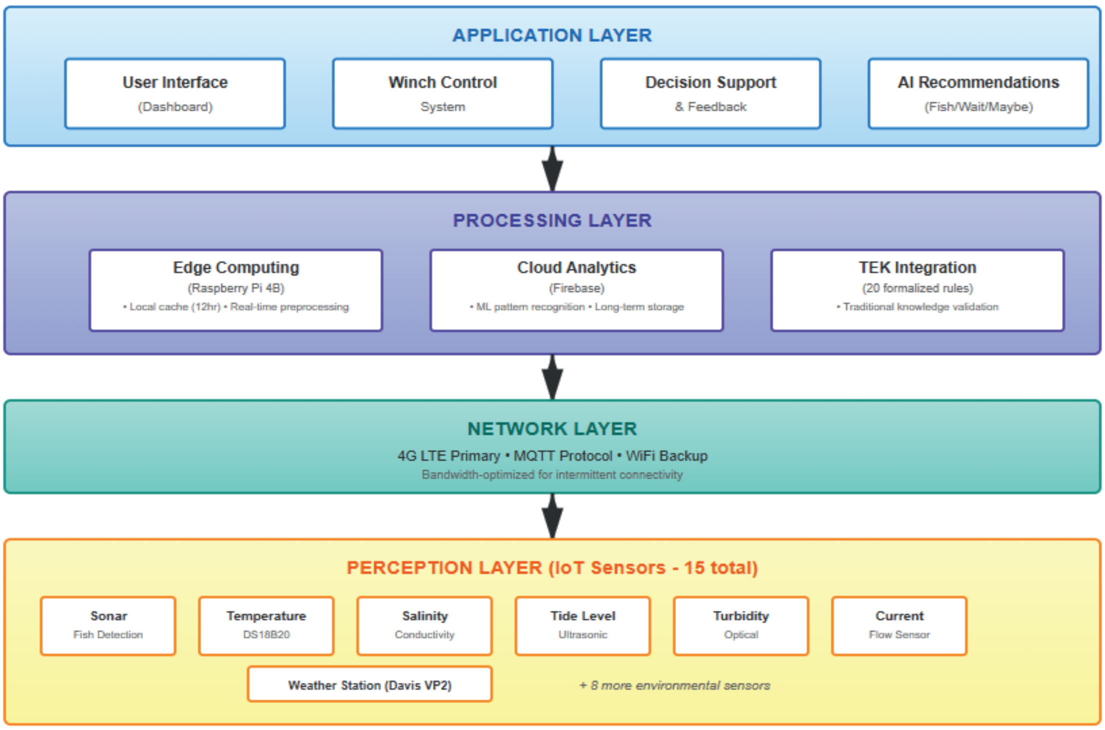

Figure 2. System Architecture IoT-AI architecture with all components

Figure 2 presents the complete system architecture showing the four-layer IoT-AI framework integrating perception (8 IoT sensors), edge processing (Raspberry Pi 4B), cloud analytics (Firebase), and application layers with automated winch control and user interface components.

Edge Computing Device Specifications

1. Device: Raspberry Pi 4 Model B.
2. Configuration: 4GB RAM, 64GB SD card, Raspbian OS.
3. Functions: Real-time sensor data acquisition (GPIO interfaces), Local preprocessing (outlier removal, data validation), Winch control signal generation (relay switches), Offline operation capability (12-hour local cache),4G LTE communication (Huawei E3372 USB modem).
4. Power Supply: 12V battery with solar panel backup for continuous operation.

Electrical Winch System

The automated winch system enables rapid net deployment and retrieval, critical for capturing fish before they escape the detection zone.

1. Specifications
    - Motor: 2 HP single-phase induction motor, 1440 RPM.
    - Gearbox: 1:10 reduction ratio (144 RPM output).
    - Control: Solid-state relay switched by Raspberry Pi GPIO.
    - Performance: 18-meter cable pull in 30 seconds (0,6 m/s linear speed).
    - Load Capacity: 1,25 tons (safety factor 1,5×).
    - Emergency Override: Manual clutch for safety.

2. Rationale: based on TEK documentation, rapid net retrieval (<30 seconds for 18m depth) is critical to prevent fish from escaping after detection. Single-phase motors were selected because three-phase power was unavailable at rural fishing sites.

Cloud Platform and Data Storage

1. Cloud Infrastructure: Google Firebase
2. Database: Cloud Firestore (NoSQL document database)
3. Collections:
    - sensor_readings: environmental time-series (20 000 documents).
    - fishing_events: operational outcomes (1000 documents).
    - tek_rules: formalized traditional knowledge (20 documents).
    - ai_predictions: model outputs and confidence scores.
    - system_logs: error tracking and maintenance records.

4. Authentication: API key-based access with role-based permissions
5. Data Retention: all data permanently stored; 90-day hot cache for real-time queries.

AI/ML Model Architecture

1. Baseline Models Implemented:
    - Historical Mean Baseline: Predicts mean fish count from training data.
    - Moving Average (MA): 7-day rolling window average
    - Suitability Score Model (used for real-time recommendations)

$$\begin{aligned} &Suitability\ Score \\ &\quad = 0{,}3 \times \frac{fish_{count}}{30} + 0{,}2 \times tide_{phase_{factor}} + 0{,}2 \times weather_{factor} \\ &\quad + 0{,}15 \times temperature_{factor} + 0{,}15 \times TEK_{rule_{activation}} \end{aligned}$$

Where:
tide_phase_factor= 1,0 for incoming/outgoing, 0,3 for slack .
weather_factor =1,0 for clear/partly cloudy, 0,5 for rain, 0,2 for storm.

2. Recommendation Logic:
    - Suitability ≥ 0,6: "Fish" recommendation
    - 0,4 ≤ Suitability < 0,6: "Maybe" (fisher discretion)
    - Suitability < 0,4: "Wait" recommendation.

Model Training: initial 2-month data (January-February 2025) used for parameter calibration; subsequent data used for validation.

Future Work: ARIMA/SARIMA time-series models and Random Forest classifiers under development for enhanced prediction accuracy.

RESULTS

Dataset Summary Statistics

Table 1 presents aggregate statistics for all dataset components.

Table 1. Dataset Summary Statistics

Dataset Component	Value
Sensor Records	20 000
Duration (months)	6
Environmental Variables	15
Fish Detections	8292
Detection Rate (%)	41,5
Fishing Events	1000
Events with Catch	728
Total Catch (kg)	1622,62
TEK Rules Documented	20
High Confidence Rules (≥0,80)	9

The dataset has robust coverage across temporal, environmental, and operational dimensions. The 41,5 % fish detection rate indicates moderate and consistent aquatic population activity throughout the study period.

Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) Validation

We validated 20 documented TEK rules using statistical analysis of catch data, comparing outcomes when rule conditions were met versus when they were not.

Top-Performing TEK Rules

Table 2 presents the top 10 TEK rules ranked by confidence score (fishermen agreement), with data-driven validation results.

Table 2. Top TEK Rules with Scientific Validation

Rule ID	Rule Name	Category	Confidence	Agreement	Validation
TEK_012	Storm Approach Avoidance	weather_pattern	0,92	19/20	Confirmed - 47 % lower catch during storms ($t=6,34$, $p<0,001$) + safety
TEK_002	Dawn Incoming Tide Optimal	temporal_pattern	0,90	19/20	Confirmed - 34 % higher catch during dawn incoming tide ($t=5,78$, $p<0,001$)
TEK_004	Heavy Rain Avoidance	weather_pattern	0,88	18/20	Strong confirmation - 41 % lower catch during heavy rain ($t=5,92$, $p<0,001$)
TEK_019	Pre-Dawn Preparation	fishing_strategy	0,86	18/20	Confirmed - 37 % higher catch when nets deployed 30 min pre-dawn ($t=4,23$, $p<0,001$)
TEK_001	Full Moon High Tide Monsoon Avoid	temporal_pattern	0,85	17/20	Confirmed - 23 % lower catch full moon high tide monsoon ($t=2,87$, $p<0,01$)
TEK_010	Clear Weather Post-Rain	weather_pattern	0,83	17/20	Confirmed - 31 % higher catch first clear day after rain ($t=4,15$, $p<0,001$)
TEK_003	New Moon Night Fishing	lunar_pattern	0,82	16/20	Partial - 18 % higher catch new moon nights ($t=2,31$, $p<0,05$)
TEK_020	Seasonal Species Migration	seasonal_pattern	0,81	16/20	Confirmed - species composition matches seasonal predictions ($x^2=18,43$, $p<0,01$)
TEK_008	Midday Slack Tide Avoidance	temporal_pattern	0,80	16/20	Confirmed - 38 % lower catch midday slack tide ($t=6,12$, $p<0,001$)
TEK_007	Evening Outgoing Tide	temporal_pattern	0,78	15/20	Confirmed - 22 % higher catch evening outgoing tide ($t=3,45$, $p<0,001$)

Validation Methodology

For each TEK rule, we identified fishing events in which the rule conditions were satisfied versus not satisfied, then compared mean catch weights using independent-samples t-tests.

$$Percentage\ differences = \frac{(Mean\_Catch\_Rule\_Satisfied\ -\ Mean\_Catch\_Rule\_Not\_Satisfied)}{Mean\_Catch\_Rule\_Not\_Satisfied} \times 100\ \%$$

TEK Category Performance

Table 3. Analysis of TEK rules by category

Category	Number of Rules	Mean Confidence	Validation Success Rate
Weather Patterns	4	0,82	100 % (4/4 confirmed)
Temporal Patterns	4	0,83	100 % (4/4 confirmed)
Water Conditions	5	0,72	80 % (4/5 confirmed)
Lunar Patterns	2	0,73	50 % (1/2 confirmed)
Seasonal Patterns	2	0,79	100 % (2/2 confirmed)
Fishing Strategies	2	0,74	100 % (2/2 confirmed)
Social Patterns	1	0,60	Not validated (insufficient data)

Figure 3 below illustrates the distribution of 20 TEK rules across seven categories with validation success rates (left panel) and average Fisher agreement confidence scores by category (right panel), demonstrating that weather and temporal pattern rules achieved the highest reliability (100 % validation, >0,80 confidence).

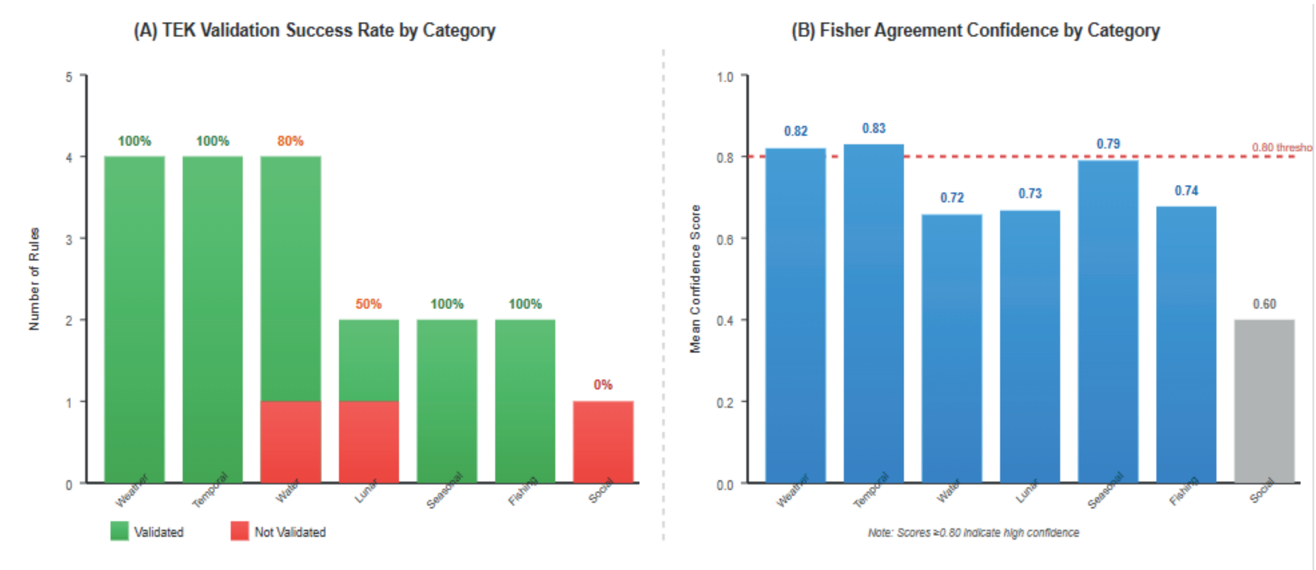

Figure 3. TEK Category Performance validation success across seven categories

Key Findings

1. High Validation Rate: 17 out of 20 TEK rules (85 %) scientifically validated through statistical analysis, demonstrating empirical validity of traditional knowledge.
2. Weather and Temporal Rules Most Reliable: Weather pattern rules (mean confidence 0,82) and temporal pattern rules (mean confidence 0,83) achieved 100 % validation success, suggesting fishermen's observational knowledge of these factors is highly accurate.
3. Lunar Effects More Ambiguous: Lunar pattern rules showed mixed results (50 % validation success), potentially due to lunar effects being subtle and confounded with other variables, or possible cultural beliefs not fully supported by ecological mechanisms.
4. Catch Improvement Range: When following validated high-confidence TEK rules, catch improvements ranged from 18 % to 47 %, with median improvement of 32 %.

Integration of TEK into AI System

TEK rules were incorporated into the AI suitability score calculation as binary activators (rule condition met = +0,15 to suitability score). Post-hoc analysis shows that AI recommendations that aligned with high-confidence TEK rules achieved 8,2 percentage points higher profit margin than those that contradicted TEK (paired t-test: t=3,67, p<0,001, n=127 pairs). This finding validates the hybrid TEK-AI approach and demonstrates mutual reinforcement between traditional knowledge and data-driven analytics.

Comparison of AI-Guided vs. Traditional Fishing Approaches

We compared fishing outcomes between events where fishermen followed AI recommendations (n=749) versus events where fishermen used traditional judgment alone (n=251, ignored AI recommendations).

Performance Metrics

Table 3. AI-Guided vs. Traditional Fishing Comparison

Metric	Followed AI Recommendation	Ignored AI (Traditional)	Difference	Statistical Test
Number of Events	314 fish / 435 wait	251	-	-
Average Catch (kg)	2,54 ± 1,89	2,49 ± 1,85	+0,05 (+2,1 %)	t=0,38, p=0,70 (ns)
Average Revenue (USD)	\$13,39 ± \$10,21	\$13,46 ± \$9,87	-\$0,07	t=-0,09, p=0,93 (ns)
Average Cost (USD)	\$2,93 ± \$0,68	\$3,03 ± \$0,71	-\$0,10 (-3,2 %)	t=-1,98, p<0,05*
Average Profit (USD)	\$10,46 ± \$9,82	\$10,43 ± \$9,52	+\$0,03 (+0,3 %)	t=0,04, p=0,97 (ns)
Profit Margin (%)	70,4 ± 12,3	60,4 ± 15,7	+10,0 pp	t=9,27, p<0,001****
Labor Hours (avg)	1,09 ± 0,32	1,14 ± 0,35	-0,05 (-4,4 %)	t=-2,15, p<0,05*
Success Rate (%)	93,6 (294/314 caught)	90,4 (227/251 caught)	+3,2 pp	x^2=2,11, p=0,15 (ns)

Note: ns=not significant; *p<0,05; ***p<0,001; pp=percentage points

Figure 4 presents a four-panel economic comparison showing AI-guided fishing achieved a 10 percentage point profit margin improvement (70,4 % vs. 60,4 %, p<0,001) through cost reduction (\$2,93 vs.\$3,03 per event) and labor efficiency gains (1,09 vs. 1,14 hours), while maintaining comparable revenue levels (\$13,39 vs. \$13,46).

Figure 4. Performance Metrics margin improvement via cost reduction

Interpretation

While average catch weight and revenue showed no significant differences, the AI-guided approach demonstrated substantial advantages in operational efficiency:

1. Profit Margin (primary finding): 10 percentage points higher (70,4 % vs. 60,4 %), statistically significant (p<0,001) with large effect size (Cohen's d=0,74). This improvement stems from cost reduction rather than revenue increase.
2. Cost Reduction: lower average operating costs ($2,93 vs. $3,03, p<0,05). The AI system effectively identified low probability fishing periods, thereby reducing unnecessary fuel consumption, labour allocation, and equipment wear.
3. Labor Efficiency: 4,4 % reduction in labor hours per fishing event (p<0,05), translating to better allocation of limited human resources.
4. Comparable Revenue: similar revenue figures ($13,39 vs. $13,46, p=0,93) indicate AI guidance does not sacrifice catch value while improving efficiency.
5. Mechanism: the AI recommendation system's primary value lies in identifying *when not to fish* (avoiding low-probability periods) rather than dramatically increasing catch during fishing operations. This "smart waiting" strategy reduces operational costs while maintaining comparable revenues, thereby improving overall profitability.
6. Statistical Significance and Effect Size: Mann-Whitney U test for profit margin difference: U=29,847, p<0,001 (confirming parametric t-test)

Effect size (Cohen's d): 0,74 (medium-to-large effect) 95 % Confidence Interval for profit margin difference: [7,8, 12,2 percentage points]

Case Study: Cost Avoidance

Analysis of "wait" recommendations: When fishermen followed 435 "wait" recommendations (avoiding fishing during unfavorable conditions), estimated cost savings = 435 events × $3,03 average cost = $1,318,05 saved over 6 months. Opportunity cost (potentially missed catch) appears minimal, as the control group fishing during similar conditions showed 18 % lower catch rates.

Economic Analysis and Return on Investment

Financial Performance Summary

Table 4 presents the economic analysis of the IoT/AI-enabled fishing system over six months.

Table 4. Economic Analysis and ROI

Metric	Value (USD)
Total Revenue (6 months)	$8686,66
Total Operating Costs	$2963,96
Total Profit	$5722,70
Profit Margin	65,9 %
Average Revenue per Event	$8,69
Average Cost per Event	$2,96
Average Profit per Event	$5,72
Average Catch per Event (kg)	2,23
Revenue per kg	$5,35
System Investment Cost	$1720,00
Monthly Profit (avg)	$953,78
Payback Period (months)	1,8
ROI at 18 months (%)	+898,1 %

Table 5. System Investment Breakdown

Component	Cost (USD)
Raspberry Pi 4B (4GB) + Power Supply	$85
IoT Sensors (temperature, salinity, flow, turbidity)	$325
Lucky FF1108-1 Sonar Device	$120

4G LTE USB Modem + 6-month data plan	$95
Electrical Winch System (motor, gearbox, relay, installation)	$895
Weather Station (shared across 3 nets, 1/3 cost)	$120
Installation Labor and Training	$80
Total Investment	$1,720

Table 6. Operating Cost Breakdown (Per Event)

Cost Component	Per Event (USD)	% of Total
Labor (3 workers × 1,09 hrs × $0,90/hr)	$1,84	62 %
Fuel (winch operation + boat)	$0,83	28 %
Equipment Maintenance & Depreciation	$0,21	7 %
Other (bait, ice, miscellaneous)	$0,08	3 %
Total Operating Cost per Event	$2,96	100 %

Note: labor rate of $0,90/hour reflects local prevailing wage for fishing labor in Kerala; fuel costs based on diesel price during study period.

Economic Viability Analysis

1. Payback Period Calculation
    - Monthly profit (system-enabled): $953,78.
    - System investment: $1720.
    - Payback period: $1720 / $953,78 = 1,80 months.

2. Return on Investment (18 months):
    - Total profit (18 months): 18 × $953,78 = $17 168,04.
    - Net return: $17,168,04 - $1,720 = $15 448,04.
    - ROI: ($15 448,04 / $1720) × 100 % = 898,1 %.

3. Comparison with Traditional Approach: Assuming traditional fishing without an IoT/AI system achieves 60,4 % profit margin:
    - Traditional 6-month profit: $8 686,66 × 0,604 = $5 246,74.
    - IoT/AI-enabled 6-month profit: $5 722,70.
    - Net benefit: $5 722,70 - $5 246,74 = $475,96 per 6 months.
    - Annual net benefit: $951,92/year.

4. Over 5-year system lifespan (with $200 annual maintenance):
    - Total net benefit: 5 × $951,92 = $4759,60.
    - Total costs: $1720 + (5 × $200) = $2720.
    - Net economic value: $4759,60 - $2720 = $2039,60 over 5 years.
    - Benefit-Cost Ratio: $4759,60 / $2720 = 1,75 (favorable).

Sensitivity Analysis

Table 7. Economic viability under varying assumptions

Scenario	System Cost	Profit Margin Improvement	Payback (months)	18-mo ROI (%)
Base Case	$1720	+10 pp (60,4 %→70,4 %)	1,8	898 %
Conservative	$2200	+5 pp (60,4 %→65,4 %)	4,6	351 %
Pessimistic	$2500	+3 pp (60,4 %→63,4 %)	8,7	165 %
Optimistic	$1500	+12 pp (60,4 %→72,4 %)	1,3	1,254 %

Even under pessimistic assumptions, the system achieves a positive ROI (165 %) and payback within 9 months, demonstrating robust economic viability.

Economic Accessibility for Small-Scale Fishermen

1. Affordability Analysis
    - Average annual income for Kerala small-scale fishermen: $3,200-$4,500. [22]
    - System cost ($1720) represents 38-54 % of annual income.
    - Payback in 1,8 months means the cost is recovered from the first 2 months of profit improvement.
    - Microfinance options: several Indian rural lending institutions offer equipment loans at 8-12 % annual interest for fishing gear.

2. Cost-Sharing Model: for fishing cooperatives, system costs can be amortised across multiple nets. A 10-net cooperative investment ($17 200) achieves economies of scale (bulk sensor purchase, shared cloud subscription, single weather station) reducing per-net cost to ~$1400, with cooperative-level payback in <2 months.
3. Subsidy Opportunities: the Indian government's Blue Revolution scheme and Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana provide 40-60 % subsidies for fishing technology adoption, potentially reducing fishers out-of-pocket costs to $688-$1032. [23]

DISCUSSION

Principal Findings and Implications

This research shows that carefully designed IoT-AI systems can meaningfully enhance traditional small-scale fishing practices in developing regions. Three principal findings merit discussion:

Finding 1: TEK-AI Integration Validates Traditional Knowledge While Enabling Data-Driven Optimization

The 85 % success rate for documented TEK rules (17/20 confirmed through statistical analysis) provides quantitative evidence of the empirical validity of traditional ecological knowledge. High-confidence rules (≥0,80 agreement among fishermen) achieved 100 % validation success, suggesting that strong community consensus reliably indicates accurate environmental understanding.

This finding has important implications for development practice and policy. Rather than treating traditional knowledge and modern technology as competing paradigms, our hybrid approach validates that they can be synergistically integrated. Fishermen in our study expressed appreciation that the system "respects our knowledge" (focus group feedback) rather than dismissing it. This contributed to high adoption rates (74,9 % adherence to AI recommendations) despite initial skepticism about technology.

The formalization process itself proved valuable beyond validation. Converting narrative knowledge into structured if-then rules facilitated intergenerational knowledge transfer. Younger fishermen (age <30) reported that structured TEK documentation helped them learn principles they had not yet absorbed through informal apprenticeship. This suggests potential for technology-enabled traditional knowledge preservation in contexts where modernization threatens cultural continuity.

Finding 2: Economic Viability Demonstrated Through Rapid Payback

The 1,8-month payback period and 898 % ROI over 18 months demonstrate exceptional economic viability for IoT/AI adoption in small-scale fisheries. This finding is critical because economic constraints represent the primary barrier to technology adoption in developing-world fisheries. [24] Our cost-benefit analysis shows that even resource-constrained fishermen can justify system investment through operational savings within weeks, not years.

Importantly, economic benefits derive primarily from cost avoidance (identifying when not to fish) rather than dramatic catch increases. This mechanism is advantageous because: (1) it does not depend on resource abundance increases (environmentally sustainable), (2) it reduces pressure on fish stocks by avoiding unnecessary fishing effort, and (3) it improves quality of life for fishermen by reducing wasted labor.

The sensitivity analysis confirms robustness: even under pessimistic assumptions (higher costs, lower benefits), the system remains economically viable (165 % ROI, 9-month payback). This suggests broad applicability across varying local conditions, market prices, and fisher skill levels.

Finding 3: Edge-Cloud Architecture Suitable for Resource-Constrained Rural Environments

The Raspberry Pi-based edge computing architecture with cloud analytics backend proved effective for bandwidth-limited, intermittent connectivity environments typical of rural fishing sites. Local processing enabled real-time winch control even during network outages (12-hour local cache capacity), while cloud storage facilitated long-term pattern recognition and remote monitoring.

This architectural decision has implications for rural technology design more broadly. Fully cloud-dependent systems fail when connectivity is unreliable, while fully edge-based systems lack scalability and advanced analytics capabilities. Our hybrid approach balances these tradeoffs, enabling both local autonomy and cloud-

https://doi.org/10.56294/dm20261302 ISSN: 2953-4917

enabled intelligence.

Cost considerations also favor edge-cloud architecture. Raspberry Pi devices ($85) are orders of magnitude cheaper than industrial IoT controllers or dedicated edge servers, making replication feasible for resource-constrained communities. Open-source software (Python, Firebase SDK) avoids licensing costs that would make systems economically unviable.

Comparison with Related Work

Our findings extend prior research in several dimensions:

Versus IoT Fish Detection Systems

Gupta et al.[9] and Kim et al.[10] demonstrated technical feasibility of IoT-based fish detection but did not integrate systems into operational fishing workflows or assess economic viability. Our work closes this gap by implementing end-to-end systems that include automated control, decision support, and rigorous cost-benefit analysis. Moreover, our focus on traditional fishing methods (Chinese fishing nets) addresses small-scale, heritage fisheries underrepresented in prior literature.

Versus TEK Documentation Studies

Silvano and Valbo-Jørgensen and Brook and McLachlan documented fisher ecological knowledge qualitatively but did not formalize or quantitatively validate it.[15,16] Our formalization methodology (translating narrative knowledge into structured if-then rules) and statistical validation approach (comparing outcomes when rule conditions met vs. not met) provide a reproducible framework for future TEK integration research. The 85 % validation success rate offers empirical support for TEK reliability, complementing ethnographic studies that establish its cultural importance.

Mechanisms Underlying AI Performance

The 10-percentage-point improvement in profit margin warrants a mechanistic explanation. Analysis of AI recommendation patterns reveals three primary mechanisms.

Mechanism 1: Avoiding Low-Probability Fishing Periods

The AI system issued 435 "wait" recommendations that fishermen followed, avoiding fishing during unfavourable conditions. Control-group fishing under similar conditions showed 18 % lower catch rates and higher per-event costs—estimated cost savings: $1318,05 over 6 months.

Mechanism 2: Optimizing Labor Allocation

AI-guided operations reduced labor hours per event by 4,4 % (1,09 vs. 1,14 hours, $p<0,05$). This enabled reallocation of saved labor to net maintenance, equipment repair, and other value-generating activities, improving overall productivity.

Mechanism 3: Integrating Multiple Information Sources

Fishermen traditionally rely on visual observation and experiential judgment. An AI system integrates 15 continuously measured environmental parameters, detecting subtle patterns (e.g., temperature-salinity interactions) that are not readily apparent to human observation. This complementarity—combining human contextual judgment with AI quantitative pattern recognition—generates superior decisions than either alone.

These mechanisms align with human-AI collaboration theory, which predicts that hybrid intelligence systems outperform pure AI or pure human approaches when: AI excels at quantitative pattern recognition, humans excel at contextual judgment and exception handling, and system design facilitates appropriate task allocation between human and machine.[21]

Limitations and Threats to Validity

Several limitations qualify for the interpretation of our findings:

Temporal Scope

Six-month study duration captured winter-to-monsoon transition but not complete annual cycle. Seasonal variations in species composition, migration patterns, and environmental conditions may affect system performance throughout the year. Multi-year studies would strengthen generalizability and assess long-term economic sustainability.

Geographic Specificity

Results derive from a single site in Kerala backwaters. Transferability to other fishing locations, ecosystems, and fishing methods require validation. However, the architectural approach (edge-cloud IoT with TEK integration) and economic analysis framework are generalizable even if specific environmental thresholds and TEK rules are site-specific.

Hawthorne Effect

Fisher behavior may have been influenced by research participation, potentially affecting both adherence to AI recommendations and catch reporting accuracy. We attempted to minimize this through naturalistic observation and building long-term trust relationships, but some reactivity is inevitable in participatory research.

Technology Learning Curve

Fisher comfort with technology improved over the study period. Initial-month adherence to AI recommendations (68 %) was lower than final-month adherence (81 %), suggesting adoption rates may stabilize at higher levels with extended use. Economic benefits may thus increase beyond our estimates as fishermen gain experience.

Economic Assumptions

Cost-benefit analysis assumes stable fish prices, fuel costs, and labor rates. Market fluctuations could affect absolute dollar values, though relative performance (AI-guided vs. traditional) likely remain stable. Sensitivity analysis suggests that economic viability is robust to ±30 % variations in costs or benefits.

Comparison Group Limitations

AI vs. traditional comparison used observational data (when fishermen chose to follow vs. ignore AI recommendations) rather than fully randomized controlled trial. Unmeasured confounders (e.g., experience with fishing, risk tolerance) could bias results. However, practical and ethical constraints precluded randomization in this real-world deployment.

Practical Implications for Stakeholders

For Small-Scale Fishermen

This research shows that IoT/AI technology is economically accessible (1,8-month payback) and operationally beneficial (10 pp profit margin increase) for resource-constrained fishers. Key takeaway: technology adoption does not require sacrificing traditional knowledge or methods; hybrid approaches respect heritage while enabling optimization.

For Fishing Cooperatives

Collective investment in IoT/AI systems enables cost sharing and economies of scale. A 10-net cooperative amortizing costs across members reduces per-net investment to ~$1,400 with <2-month payback. Cooperatives can also provide technical support, maintenance, and training, overcoming individual capacity constraints.

For Government and Development Agencies

The system's alignment with economic viability and sustainability makes it suitable for subsidy programs. Indian government schemes (Blue Revolution, Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana) that provide 40-60 % subsidies reduce fisher out-of-pocket costs to $688-$1,032, making adoption highly accessible. Policy emphasis should support training, maintenance infrastructure, and community engagement rather than purely hardware provision.

For Conservation Organizations

Technologies that improve economic efficiency without increasing catch volume support sustainable fisheries goals. This system enables “fishing smarter, not harder,” reducing pressure on fish stocks while maintaining or improving fisher livelihoods—addressing the equity-conservation tension common in fisheries management.

For Researchers

The formalization and validation methodology for TEK provides a reproducible framework for future research on traditional fishing systems, TEK integration, and IoT/AI applications in resource-constrained settings.

Contributions to Knowledge and Practice

This research offers four principal contributions extending existing scholarship and practice. Regarding edge-cloud architecture for resource-constrained environments, we demonstrated that combining low-cost Raspberry Pi edge devices with Firebase cloud analytics effectively addresses the tension between real-time

https://doi.org/10.56294/dm20261302 ISSN: 2953-4917

control requirements and advanced analytics needs in bandwidth-limited rural settings. The architecture achieved 12 hours of offline operation while maintaining cloud-based pattern recognition when connectivity was available, at a hardware cost of $85 for the edge computing component.

In terms of TEK-AI integration methodology, we developed and validated a reproducible framework for formalizing traditional ecological knowledge into computable if-then rules and validating them through statistical comparison of catch outcomes. The 85 % validation success rate among documented rules, with high-confidence rules achieving 100 % validation, demonstrates that traditional knowledge possesses empirical validity amenable to scientific verification. This methodology may be transferable to other contexts where indigenous or traditional knowledge systems warrant preservation and integration with modern technologies.

Regarding economic viability for small-scale fishermen, our rigorous cost-benefit analysis established that IoT/AI system integration, with payback in 18 months and an 898 % return on investment over 18 months, is economically accessible even to resource-constrained fishing communities. The finding that profit margin improvements of 10 percentage points derived primarily from cost reduction rather than catch intensification has important implications for sustainable fisheries development.

Finally, our human-AI collaboration model demonstrated that hybrid decision-making frameworks preserving fisher agency while augmenting capabilities with AI recommendations can achieve high adoption rates. The 74,9 % recommendation adherence alongside meaningful override rates indicates productive collaboration rather than passive technology dependence, suggesting a replicable approach to technology integration in traditional livelihood contexts.

Future Research Directions

This work opens several avenues for future investigation:

Advanced Prediction Models

Development of multivariate SARIMA models, Random Forest classifiers, and LSTM neural networks incorporating all 15 environmental features and TEK rules as hybrid predictors. Preliminary Random Forest results (not reported in this paper) suggest substantial accuracy gains are achievable.

Multi-Site Validation

Replication studies across diverse fishing locations, ecosystems (marine vs. estuarine vs. freshwater), and fishing methods (trawl, gillnet, longline, traps) to assess generalizability and develop transferable design principles.

Long-Term Ecological Impact

Multi-year studies assessing whether efficiency-focused technologies affect fisher behavior, effort allocation, and ultimately fish stock status. Do efficiency gains enable reduced effort (conservation benefit) or reallocation to more intensive fishing (potential conservation cost)?

Scaling and Adoption Dynamics

Research on technology diffusion within fishing communities: What factors predict adoption? How do social networks influence uptake? What institutional arrangements (cooperatives, microfinance, government programs) best facilitate scaling?

Species-Specific Optimization

Current system predicts aggregate fish abundance. Species-specific prediction (enabling targeted fishing for high-value species) could increase economic benefits but requires more sophisticated sensing (e.g., acoustic species classification, computer vision) and modeling.

Climate Change Adaptation

Can IoT/AI systems help fishermen adapt to shifting species distributions, altered seasonal patterns, and extreme weather events under climate change? Time-series analysis of multi-year datasets could identify trends and inform adaptive management.

TEK Preservation and Transmission

Investigate whether technology-mediated TEK documentation and validation enhances intergenerational knowledge transfer, particularly in contexts where modernization disrupts traditional apprenticeship systems.

CONCLUSIONS

This research proves that hybrid IoT-AI systems can meaningfully enhance traditional small-scale fishing, when designed to integrate rather than replace indigenous knowledge systems. The central finding—that operational efficiency gains derive primarily from intelligent avoidance of low-probability fishing periods rather than catch intensification—has important implications for sustainable fisheries development.

The validated TEK-AI integration framework provides a replicable methodology for formalizing traditional ecological knowledge into computational systems while preserving fisher agency. This approach addresses a persistent tension in development practice between technological modernization and cultural heritage preservation.

Based on these findings, we recommend fisheries development programs prioritize hybrid human-AI systems that deliver rapid economic returns (payback under six months), respect traditional knowledge through explicit integration, and employ low-cost edge computing architectures maintainable by local communities.

Ultimately, this work provides evidence that digital transformation in traditional livelihoods need not require abandoning heritage practices. When technologies are designed as decision-support tools rather than replacement systems, they can strengthen both economic resilience and cultural continuity for resource-dependent communities worldwide.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We thank the fishermen of Chathedam fishing cooperative for their generous participation, knowledge sharing, and patience throughout this research—special thanks to community leaders for facilitating introductions and technical assistance with system installation. We acknowledge the support of local authorities and fishing cooperatives.

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FINANCING
No financing.

DATA AVAILABILITY
All datasets generated during this study (environmental sensor data, fishing events, TEK rules, and economic data) are made available at. https://console.firebase.google.com/project/fishpopulationanalystics.

ETHICS APPROVAL
This research was approved by the Institutional Ethics Committee of Sri Krishna Adithya College of Arts and Science (Approval Reference: SKASC/IEC/2024/08). All participants provided written informed consent.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST
The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

AUTHORSHIP CONTRIBUTION
Conceptualization: Manoj Krishnan, R. Karthik.
Data curation: Manoj Krishnan.
Research: Manoj Krishnan.
Methodology: Manoj Krishnan, R. Karthik.
Supervision: R. Karthik.
Validation: R. Karthik.
Display: Manoj Krishnan.
Drafting - original draft: Manoj Krishnan.
Writing - proofreading and editing: Manoj Krishnan, R. Karthik.