

Multiday fishing during southwest monsoon along the Kerala coast

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In 2015, the uniform Monsoon Fishing Ban along the west coast was promulgated for a period of 61 days by the Government of India, but was observed only for 47 days (June 15th - July 31st) in the state of Kerala. The traditional fishermen operating artisanal crafts as well as motorized fishing crafts with outboard motors (OBM) were permitted to operate in the territorial waters during this period. The major gears that operated during this period in the past years were ring seines. During the monsoon, the sea is very rough making it difficult for even experienced fishermen to go fishing. However, a gillnet and hook and line fishery have emerged recently and is gaining popularity by exploiting large pelagic fishes such as tunas, dolphin fishes, cobia etc. during these lean fishery months. It is mainly carried out using motorized fishing vessels of 30-37 feet OAL and 9.9 HP dual engine. The engine with a fuel capacity of 32.5 litres can run for about 4.5 hours with an average speed of 5 knots per hour. There are usually 5-7 people onboard these vessels which mainly operates up to a distance of 25-35 nautical miles (nmi) away from the shore. Sometimes it takes 4-7 days for each fishing trip. These fishers are highly adventurous going, fishing in the rough sea conditions during monsoon with just a polythene sheet as roof on their crafts. The gillnet operations are mainly carried out during night time, while hook and line fishing is carried out during the day hours. It takes about 5-7 hours for operating the gear. The fish hold has the capacity to store about 2 - 4 tonnes (t) of fish catch. This mainly comprises large fishes like tunas, seer fish, barracudas, dolphin fish, cobia, sail fishes, carangids, pelagic sharks and rays. The majority of



Fig 1. Traditional OBM crafts using gillnets and hooks and line set sail during monsoon

the fishermen engaged in this fishery are from Poziyoor and Poovar villages of southern Kerala. According to the fishermen although it is risky to fish in the rough seas during monsoon, it provides them a decent livelihood during the lean season.

Landings and size range recorded as Total length (TL) from a boat landed at Munambam Fishing Harbour on 17.07.2015 were Cobia (*Rachycentron canadum*, 69-81cm), Seer fish (*Scomberomorus commerson*, 60-80 cm), Dolphin fish (*Coryphaena hippurus*, 98-132 cm), Marlin (*Makaira mazara*, 100-128 cm), Sail fish (*Istiophorus platypterus*, 89-110 cm), Yellowfin tuna (*Thunnus albacares*, 69-81cm), Little tunny (*Euthynnus affinis*, 36-59 cm) and carangid (*Caranx ignobilis*, 85-110 cm) caught by in hook and line. Species like (*Mene maculata* 18-25 cm), Bullet tuna (*Auxis rochei*, 20-25 cm), Big eye scad (*Selar crumenophthalmus*, 20-25 cm), Rainbow runner (*Elagatis bipinnulata*, 40 - 64 cm) were observed in the gillnet catches.