Landings of Giant Manta Rays at Cochin Fisheries Harbour

T. G. Kishor, C. A. Shiyas, Sijo Paul, Ambily Lalgi and P. U. Zacharia
ICAR-Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute, Kochi

Three numbers of Giant Manta ray, *Manta birostris* locally known as "Aana Thirandi" measuring 220, 291 and 285 cm in standard length and weighing 680, 1080 and 1050 kg respectively were landed at Cochin Fisheries Harbour on 27th March, 2015 (Fig.1). The rays though landed by deep sea trawler, were caught by mechanized gill net boat operated at depth of 200 m off Kochi. Due to the big size of the rays caught, the gill net fishermen had transferred them to a deep sea trawler which operated nearby. The rays were identified as *Manta birostris* due to its characteristic features of terminal mouth differentiating it from the genus *Mobula* which has its mouth on the ventral side;

Fig. 1. Manta rays landed at Cochin fisheries harbor

large cephalic horns and white shoulder markings. Belonging to the family Myliobatidae, they are found in temperate and tropical seas and are primarily plankton feeders. They take a long time to reach

sexual maturity, have long gestation periods and often give birth to a single pup. *Manta birostris* is considered as "Vulnerable" by the IUCN Red List of threatened Species. In 2014, trade of fins and gill plates of manta rays was regulated by including under CITES Appendix II.

The three rays were auctioned for ₹ 130,000. Out of the three specimens landed, two were mature females and the other a mature male with long, calcified claspers. One of the mature female measuring 556 cm in disc width when cut open, had a pup which measured 62 cm in standard length, 102.5 cm disc width and weighed 7.2 kg (Fig. 2). Stomachs of all the rays were empty. There is increasing demand for the gill plates of Manta rays in southeast Asian countries for medical purpose as

Fig. 2. Pup of *Manta birostris*

well as for preparation of soups. Dried filter plates of Manta rays can fetch upto ₹ 8000 per kilogram.