

Oil sardine from Tamil Nadu in fish markets of Kerala

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Oil sardine, *Sardinella longiceps* is a highly favoured fish in Kerala, due to the unique taste of locally caught sardines, as perceived by many fish consumers in the state. Normally, the oil sardine forms the major catch of traditional fisherman in Kerala almost around the year. Recently, after the peak landings in 2012, catches have showed drastic decline with the trend continuing in 2016 also (Fig. 1). It directly affected the livelihood of thousands of local ringseine fishermen. Several reasons including environmental / oceanographic changes associated with *El Niño* and the high exploitation of juvenile sardines in recent past, have been attributed to this decline in sardine catches. Demand for oil sardine is always high in Kerala and with local supply disrupted due to decline of the fishery, several tonnes of oil sardine, mainly from Tamil Nadu was transported to Kerala to meet the consumers demand. Trucks from Tamil Nadu mainly from Cudaloor, Puducherry and Nagapattinam region were regularly coming to Kerala with capacity of 200 boxes, each containing 30 kg of oil sardines in iced condition as revealed during regular surveys of landing centres. Sardines were unloaded at major landing centres based on demand from the local agents. Immediately after unloading, fishes were washed and sorted based on size and appearance (freshness); repacked in ice and sent to the local markets. The washed and repacked sardines (Chala)

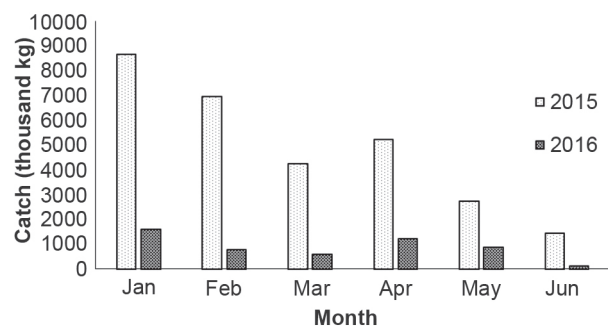


Fig. 1. Monthly landings of oil sardine in Kerala for the year 2015 and 2016



Unloading of oil sardine brought from Tamil Nadu at Kalamukku



Washing and sorting



Re-iced in boxes for local markets

appearing fresh were marketed as freshly caught Kerala sardine prefixed with local landing centre names like Vypin chala, Ponnani chala, Punnpra chala to attract buyers and fetch higher prices, which varied between ₹ 80-140 per kg. Evidently the price increased heavily in this particular market chain, when oil sardine caught in Tamil Nadu reached fish markets in Kerala and the profit earned by the middlemen involved in the marketing process was higher than the fishermen themselves.