

The seasonal hand line fishery for yellowfin tuna at Colachel

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In Tamil Nadu, the oceanic tunas like skipjack and yellowfin tuna are exploited mainly by multiday drift gill netters. However, in Colachel, Kanyakumari, there is a seasonal fishery targeting yellowfin tuna of medium size weighing around 30

kg, with hand lines that are operated from multiday trawlers. This is an additional income for both the fishermen and the trawl boat owners.

The main season is from February to April. Hand line with hooks (Hook Size Numbers 7-8) are

operated akin to pole and line and trolling, usually in the early morning. The non-edible fish by-catch from the previous day's trawling is used as bait for the operations. Once the tunas are located, the fish by-catch is broadcast into the sea and along with it the hand line is also dropped into the water while the boat keeps moving slowly. The line is pulled in once the tuna is hooked. The fishing ground is within the shelf area only and the tunas are found near the surface. Tunas of an average size of 114 cm Fork Length (FL) either in fully mature stage or in partially spent condition are caught. This clearly indicates presence of spawning shoals and that

February-April probably is a major spawning season. Many tunas had stomachs replete with juvenile ribbon fish which was actually the by-catch broadcast into the sea which shows that these tunas were in search of food. The mode of fishing without baits hung on the hooks and hand lines operated from the trawlers without any additional modification is unusual. The flesh of these tunas were not of *Sashimi* grade. They were subsequently and degutted, their gills removed, cleaned thoroughly with water, packed in ice and sent to the processing plant for further preservation in -40° C, for exporting.