

Marine fish landings in West Bengal during 2016 - An overview

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A remarkable increase in marine fish landings in West Bengal was recorded in 2016. The estimated total marine fish landings with a 129% upsurge reached 2.72 lakh t from the 1.19 lakh t recorded in 2015. Almost all the main finfish resources showed an increase but the exceptional dominance was of Hilsa shad. Its estimated landings touched a record high of 89,109 t from the 16,273 t recorded in 2015. The increase was found to sustain throughout the year except during the fishing ban (April-May) period and in November and December. The trend in the total marine fish landings of West Bengal and Hilsa shad since 2007 is given (Fig. 1).

Pelagic resources such as hilsa shad, bombayduck and anchovies contributed 68% of the total landings



Fig. 1. Trend in the total marine fish and Hilsa shad landings (lakh t)

of the state and were mainly caught by gillnetters. Demersal finfish constituted 22% in which catfish, croakers and pomfrets were landed by gillnetters as

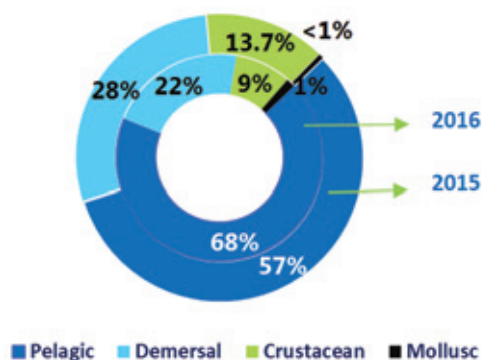


Fig. 2. Assemblage-wise contribution to total marine fish landings in West Bengal in 2015 and 2016

well as trawlers. The crustacean landings assessed at 9% of the total landings and molluscan resources at 1% were mainly caught in trawls and bagnets (Fig. 2).

Resource wise Hilsa shad, (*Tenualosa ilisha*), locally known as *Ilish* contributed 33% of the total landings of the state and most of it (96%) was harvested by the gillnetters. The other major resources landed were bombayduck, catfish, anchovies, penaeid prawns and croakers. In comparison to 2015, the landings of Bombayduck doubled with 31,333 t and 58% of this was contributed by bagnet. Catfish, another important resource in the state showed a three fold hike from previous year, with 17,414 t landed which is the highest catch of this resource in the last five years. The catfish catch chiefly comprised of the *Arius* spp. and were caught by gillnetters. The anchovies (*Coilia*, *Setipinna* and *Stolephorus*) at an estimated 15,898 t was double that of previous year and mostly harvested by trawlers and bagnetter. Penaeid prawn landings estimated at 14,895 t showed significant increase from the previous year's catch of 5,897 t.

Sector-wise landings indicated mechanised fishing crafts contributed 90% of the total catch, motorised sector 9.9% and traditional non-motorised fishing craft only 0.1%. Gillnetters have a major share (59%) of the catch in the mechanised sector at 1,44,482 t followed by trawlers (31%) and rest by bagnets and hooks & line.

In motorised sector bagnets with 16,399 t contributed 61% of the total landings. Gillnet, shoreseines and hooks & lines were used by

motorised fishing crafts. A comparison of catch per unit effort (in kg/unit) of major gears in both mechanised and motorised sector was made (Figs. 3 & 4). The catch per hour increased slightly in the case of mechanised trawl-net, gillnet and hook & lines whereas plummeted to less than half of what it was in 2015 in bagnet. In the motorised sector, catch per unit effort of shoreseine showed more than 50% jump from previous year.



Fig. 3. Comparison of catch per unit effort in mechanised sector in 2015 and 2016

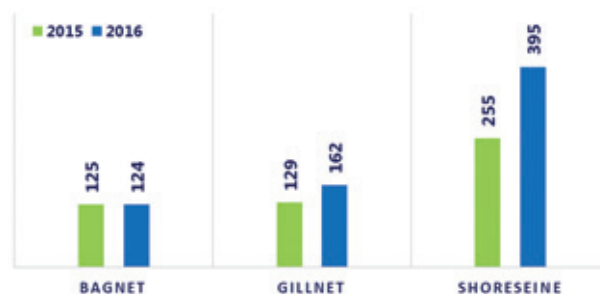


Fig. 4. Comparison of catch per unit effort in motorised sector in 2015 and 2016

District-wise contribution indicated South 24 Paraganas adjacent to the *Sunderbans* was the chief contributor with 2.39 lakh t (88%) of the total marine fish landings. The major fishing harbours of the district which are in Kakdwip, Namkhana, Fraserganj, Raidighi and Sultanpur have good facilities for berthing, marketing and other maintenance services. Nearly thirty marine fish landing centres are present in Purba Midnapur district and in a majority of them only seasonal fishing using traditional fishing crafts is observed. The district contributed 0.32 lakh t (12%) of the total marine fish landings. Major fishing harbours here were Digha Mohana, Sankarpur, Patuaghat and Rasulpur.

Generally, the fourth quarter of the year (October-December) contributes most to the marine fish landings in the state. In a contradiction, the third quarter (July-September) of 2016 had the maximum catch (1.24 lakh t) which formed 45% of the total marine fish landings. The first quarter contributed 73,304 t (27%). The landings of the fourth quarter was estimated at 58,000 t (22%) which was comparably very less to that in 2015. The second quarter (April-June) contributed the rest (6%).

It can be concluded that the marine fishery sector of West Bengal has recovered in the year 2016 from the declining fishery trends in the previous years. The reckless fishing for juvenile fishes using mosquito net type fishing gears has been curbed. Employing good practices of fishing in the coming years can benefit not only the 81,000 fishermen families in the coastal districts but also the entire population of the state where fish is a highly relished food.