

Marine scientists exult over success of pilot project

Orange-spotted grouper, Indian pompano command good price in global market

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A small group of marine scientists on-board R.V. Cadalmin-I broke into a dance on seeing two varieties of fish grown in cages erected in the territorial waters from the baseline of the coast brought to the shore.

The maiden harvest of orange-spotted grouper (*Epinephelus coioides*) and Indian pompano (*Trachinotus mookalee*) in cages signalled a landmark in the history of Indian mariculture on Thursday.

This was the first time after the pilot project taken up almost a year ago by the Visakhapatnam Regional Centre of ICAR-Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute the maiden harvest was symbolically flagged off.

“For the first time, successful cage culture has been done after developing the seed technology at our lab,” an overwhelmed A. Gopalakrishnan, Director, CMFRI told *The Hindu*.

The yield is estimated at 9 tonnes. The formal flagging off of the harvested fish will be made on August 18 after which they will be sent to Kolkata for the West Bengal Fisheries Development Corporation. The average growth is around 750 gram. The groupers have grown on average to 1.5 kg to 1.8 kg. Of nine cages, one was earmarked for orange-spotted grouper and three for Indian pompano. Five others are devoted for brood stock.

The average production cost is ₹180 as against farm-gate price of ₹350. The grouper, which is most sought after, fetches ₹1,500



Maiden yield: Orange-spotted grouper fish being collected from a cage installed by the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute, off Visakhapatnam. •K.R. DEEPAK

per kg if sold live in South East Asia and other countries. Frozen ones are sold at ₹750 per kg in Dubai.

Pond culture

The two species have a huge demand in finfish mariculture, said Shubhadeep Ghosh, Principal Scientist Visakhapatnam Regional Centre of CMFRI, adding they had encouraged pond culture of the two species at Nagayalanka in Krishna and Bhimavaram in West Godavari district. He thanked the scientists at the local centre for developing seed production technology. The two species are highly amenable to cage farming with impressive growth rate and survival. Imelda Joseph, head of mariculture division of CMFRI and G. Gopakumar, an authority on mariculture, said that the harvest was the first reported grow-out and it would contribute immensely to the blue revolution.

Hitting the right formula

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The harvest was performed from four HDPE cages of six metre diameter and four metre depth. The cages were moored in the sea using 14 mm-long linked alloy steel chain and concrete iron blocks.

According to CMFRI scientists, around 1,000 grouper advanced fry measuring 3 cm in length were stocked in a cage in May 2017.

The fish were fed pellet form at 10% of biomass twice a day until they grew to 100 grams in three months. The fish were fed later with low-value fish at five to seven of biomass twice a day. Net and cage frame

cleaning and net exchange were done at monthly intervals. After 15 months, the fish reached on an average 2.5 kg. With survival of more than 95%, the yield obtained from one cage was 2.41 tonnes. They were sold at prices in excess of ₹300 per kg.

Around 3,000 Indian pompano advanced fry measuring 5.25 cm and 2.5 g were stocked in one cage in the month of August, 2017. Later, the stock of Indian pompano was segregated into three cages. Net and cage frame cleaning and net exchange was performed at monthly intervals. After 12 months, the fish reached on an average 0.75 kg.