

Observations on the fishing of polychaete worm in the intertidal region of Tuticorin Bay

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As an alternative livelihood sources fishers from Thoothukudi, Puducherry and Chidambaram are regularly harvesting the polychaete worms found Tuticorin Bay. The polychaete worms collected were identified as *Marphysa* spp (Fig. 1). While the fishers from Puducherry are collecting the worms for the live bait industry, the groups from Chidambaram are collecting it for shrimp hatcheries to be used as a live feed for shrimp brooders. Groups of fishermen

are harvesting the worms during the low tide time from the intertidal region especially in the early morning hours. The process includes the spotting of the worm burrows followed by excavating the soil with a spade. While one person digs the other searches for the polychaete worms by breaking the lumps. The digging of the earth is done even up to two meter depths for getting sufficient numbers. The collected worms have to be kept in live



Fig. 1. Harvested *Marphysa* sp.

condition in clean vessels with seawater until they are handed over to agents of shrimp farmers. When

used as prawn maturation feed in hatcheries. Each group is reported to collect around one kilogram of live worms per day which earns them ₹ 300 per kg on the spot itself. Earlier there was not much demand for this worm, due to its reported role as a passive vector for the white spot syndrome virus in cultured shrimps. However, now the polychaete worms are back in demand. Its role as a maturation diet for the brooders of *Penaeus vannamei* in the prawn hatcheries and local shrimp farms is driving this trend. There is scope for culture of this polychaete in India to meet the growing market demand and also to prevent overexploitation in wild populations.