

Heavy landings of bull sharks in Digha, West Bengal

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Elasmobranchs (sharks, rays, skates and guitarfishes) form one of the important commercial fisheries of West Bengal. They are not targeted but usually occur as by-catch and due to demand for sharks in the national and international markets are remunerative. West Bengal contributes 10.51% to the total elasmobranch landing of India. The local demand for shark or rays is very little but fish trading and processing units which supply

such products to distant places such as Kochi, Chennai, Visakhapatnam and even to the international market procure sharks from the fishermen.

In Digha the landing of bull sharks usually increases during the winter time. A total of 56 numbers of bull sharks in length range of 95-295 cm (total length) weighing between 9 to 335 kg each were landed at

Digha Mohana fish landing centre, West Bengal, India during October 2018 to March, 2019. Of these, 35 were males and 21 were females which were all adults and mostly mature. The bull sharks are amphidromous as they are born in freshwater and estuaries after which the juveniles enter marine environment for growing into adults and finally the adults migrate back into freshwater and estuary to breed and repeat the cycle. This also indicates that the adults and juveniles show visible ecological and geographical segregation which could be one of the reasons for dominance of adults in the marine fish landings. By interviewing fishermen in

the multiday trawlers it was revealed that the catches came from the fishing areas of Rakhyaskhali and Bokhali, south-east of Digha approximately 55-60 km away from the shore. The trawlers (approximately 55 feet OAL) having engine power of 420 hp and 3000 kg fish hold capacity are usually operated for 6-8 days at a depth of 20-50 m. Such trawlers usually bring two to three numbers of bull sharks while targeting hilsha, pomfrets, croakers and shrimps. The whole bull sharks are sold to the traders at a price range of ₹150-250 per kg at the auction market. The meat is exported in frozen form and fins are usually dried.