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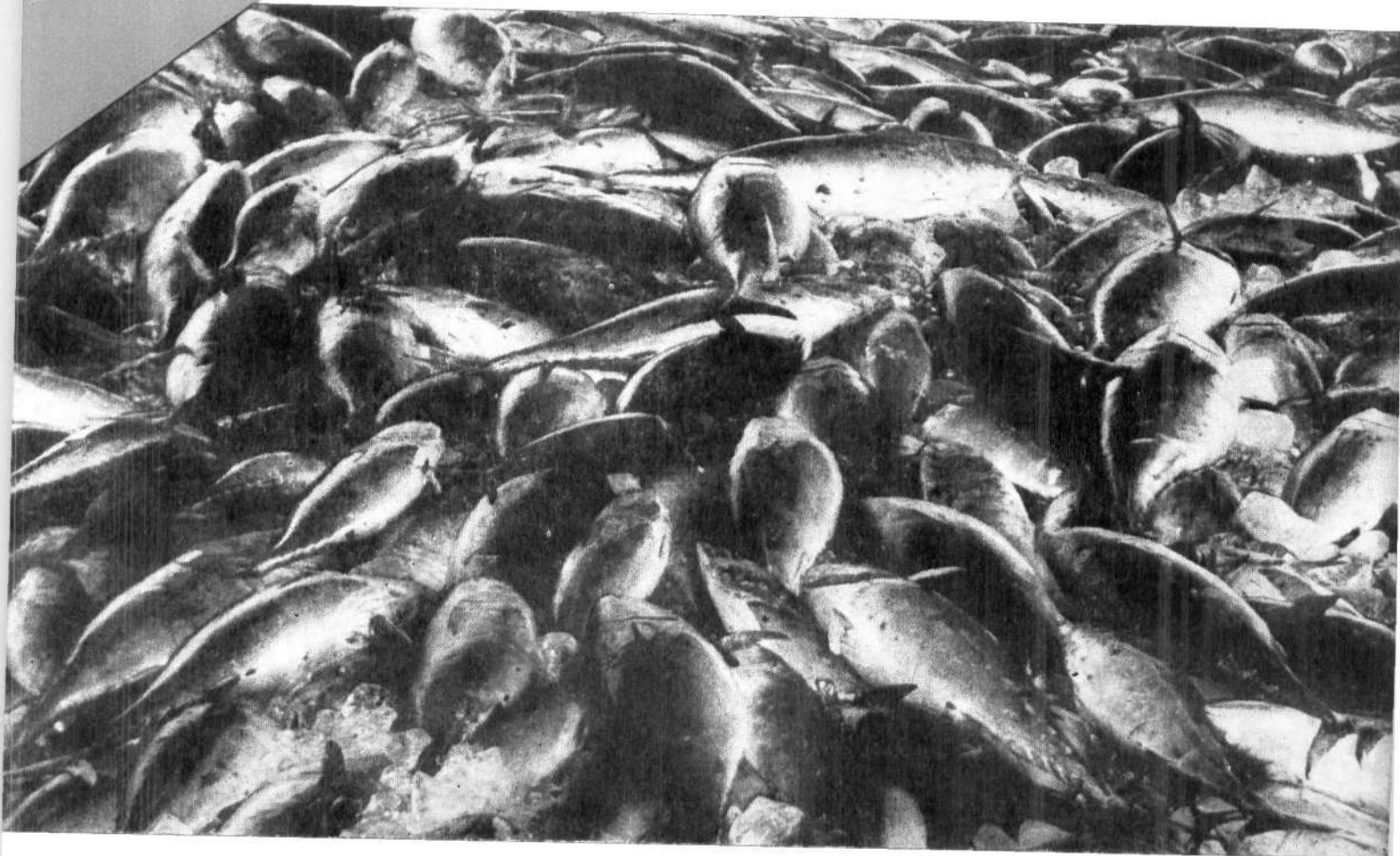
bulletin 36



JUNE 1985

TUNA FISHERIES OF THE EXCLUSIVE ECONOMIC ZONE OF INDIA: Biology and Stock Assessment

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EXPLORATORY FISHING BY OCEANIC DRIFT GILLNETTING AND PURSE SEINING IN THE LAKSHADWEEP

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With a view to develop the oceanic pelagic fisheries, it was planned as early as 1965 to conduct exploratory fishing in the offshore and oceanic areas by drift gillnetting and purse seining. During the cruises of *R. V. Varuna* it was possible to plan out the operation of drift gillnet fishing which was started in January 1965 and continued as and when possible upto the end of January 1968. Purse seining for tunas was also conducted by *R. V. Varuna* and *M. V. Tuna* of the erst-while Indo-Norwegian Project. Although during the cruises scouting for tuna was conducted by sonar (ASDIC) (horizontal range 1500 m) and echosounders, it was found that visual scouting was more effective. The characteristic sonic spires in the Deep scattering layer between 300 and 450 metre were observed and it is presumed that these could be due to the presence of larger tunas such as bigeye and possibly billfishes at that depth. A brief summary of the results of the operations has been presented earlier (Silas 1969).

EXPLORATORY DRIFT GILLNETTING

A number of units of drift gillnets made of nylon was used at each operation, each unit being 25.85 m long and 6.10 m broad. In a single unit the mesh size was the same and units with mesh size 2.5, 5.5, 10.0, 12.5 and 17.0 cm were used. The smaller mesh

sizes were selected specially for collecting juvenile of pelagic fishes.

The area of operation is presented in Fig. 1. The nets were operated in the Lakshadweep Sea as well as in the continental shelf off the south-west coast. A summary of the total operational details is as follows :

No. of fishing operation	= 86
Total soaking time	= 794.50 hrs.
Total catch	= 2,522.0 kg.
Av. catch/fishing operation	= 29.33 kg.
Total catch of tunas	= 853 kg.

The number of units of nets varied from 14 to 45. The maximum soaking time of the net for a single operation was 15.00 hrs. and the minimum 4 hrs. and 10 minutes. Mostly handling was done manually, but on a few occasions a line hauler fixed on the port side was used. The effective fishing depth was from surface to between 4 and 5 m.

The number of specimens, size range, percentage composition, and average weight of tunas (squids and other pelagics such as horse mackerel and *Coryphaena* sp are not considered here) were as follows :

	No. of specimen	Fork length (cm)	% composition (by weight)	Total (weight kg)	Average weight (kg)
<i>A. rochet</i>	141	191-290	2.8	24	0.168
<i>A. thazard</i>	153	201-510	13.5	115	0.750
<i>E. affinis</i>	238	281-620	62.1	531	2.232
<i>S. orientalis</i>	21	281-520	3.2	27	1.309
<i>K. pelamis</i>	38	421-650	14.9	127	3.347
<i>T. tonggol</i>	1	447	0.5	4	
<i>T. albacares</i>	7	500-650	3.0	25	3.500

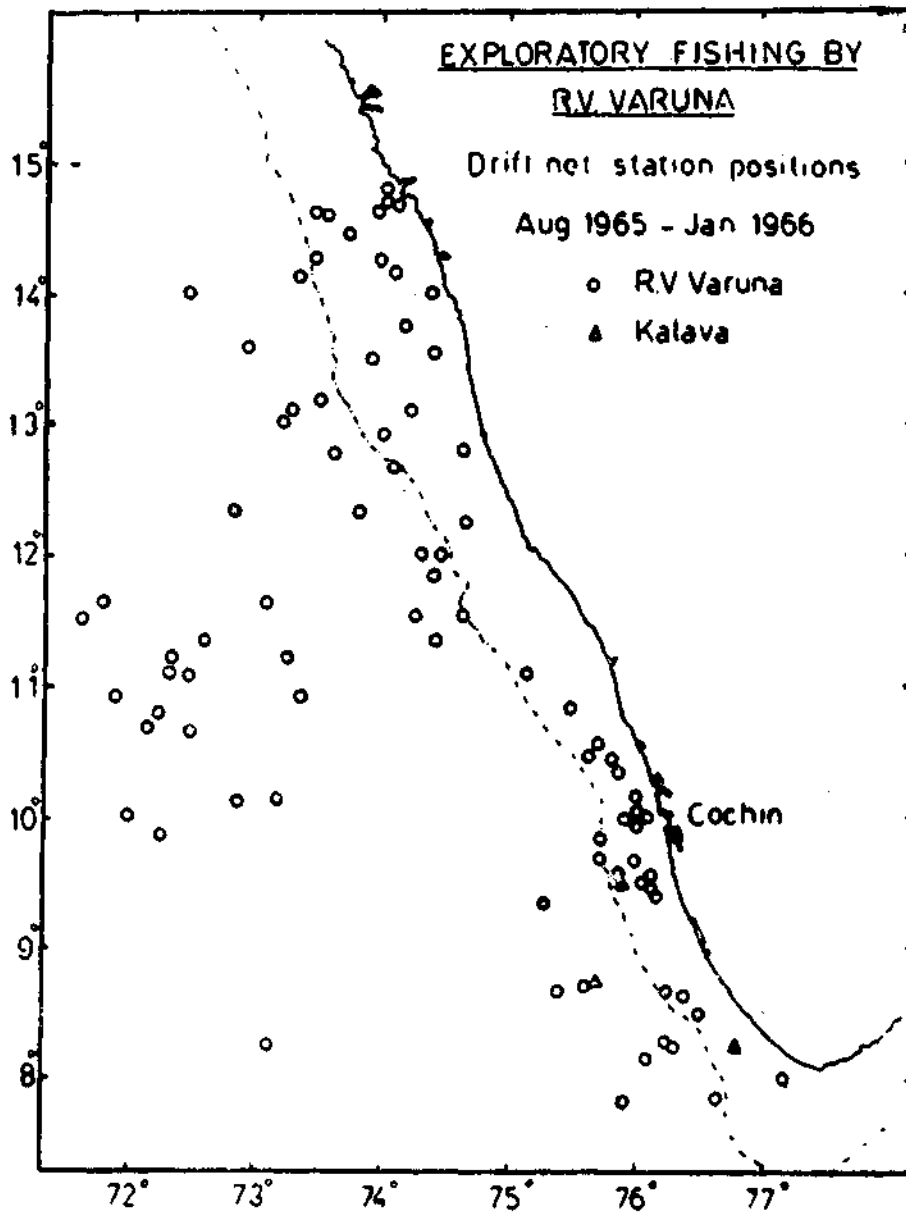


Fig. 1. R. V. *VARUNA* station positions of experimental oceanic drift gillnetting conducted during Aug. 1965-Jan., '66.

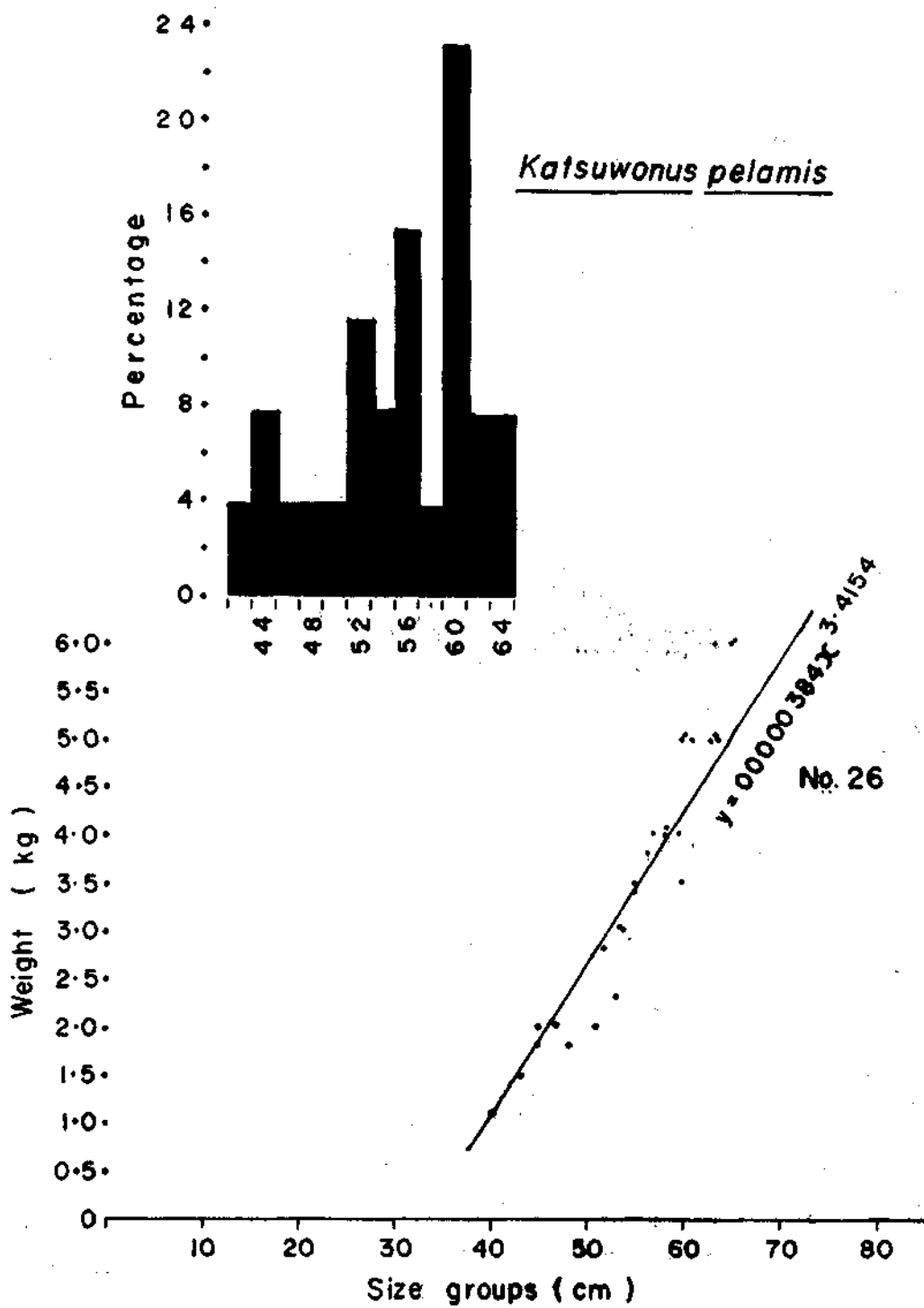


Fig. 2. Length frequency distribution (percentage) and the length-weight relationship of *K. pelamis* taken during the oceanic drift gillnetting.

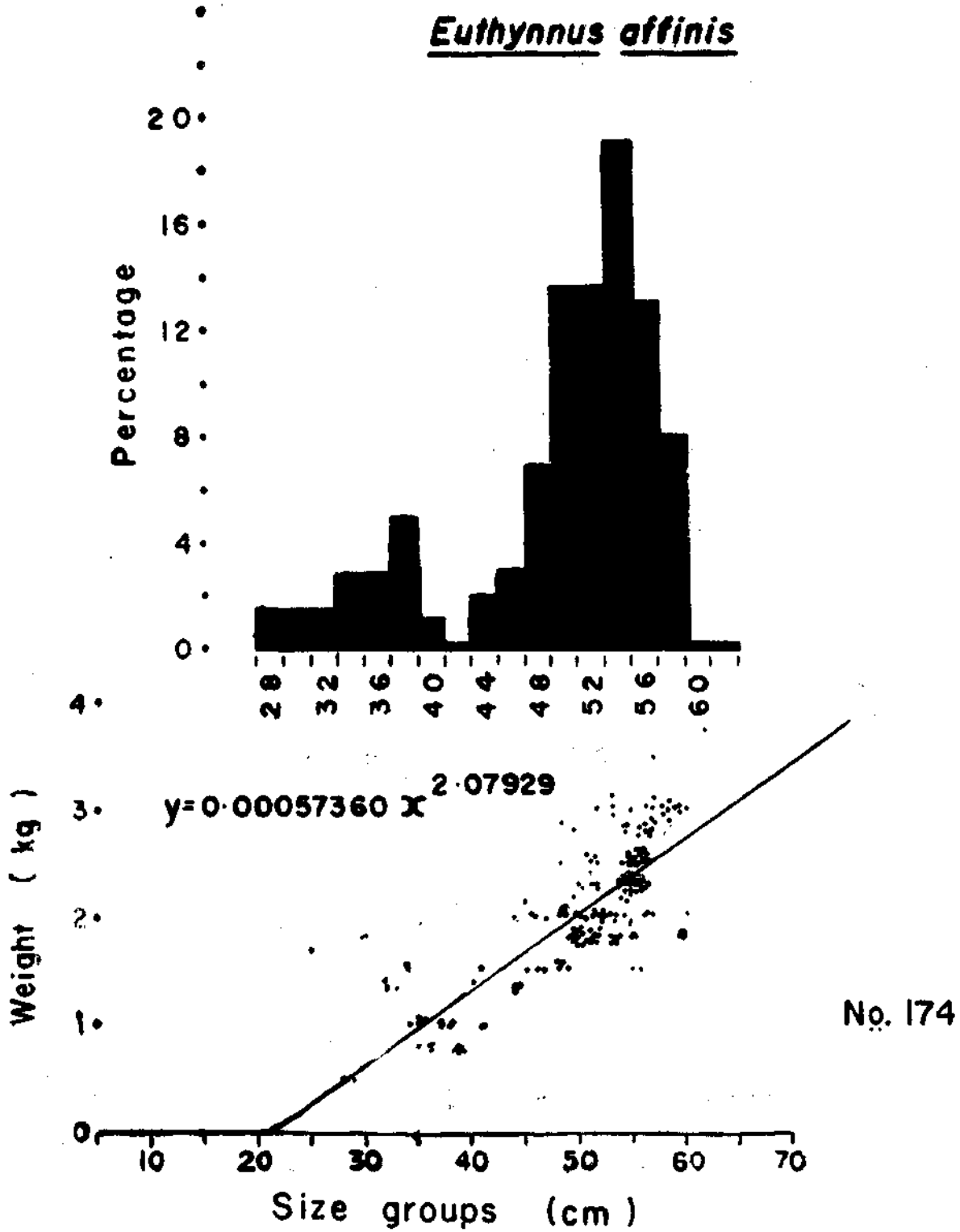


Fig. 3. Length frequency distribution (percentage) and the length weight relationship of *E. affinis* taken during the oceanic drift gillnetting.

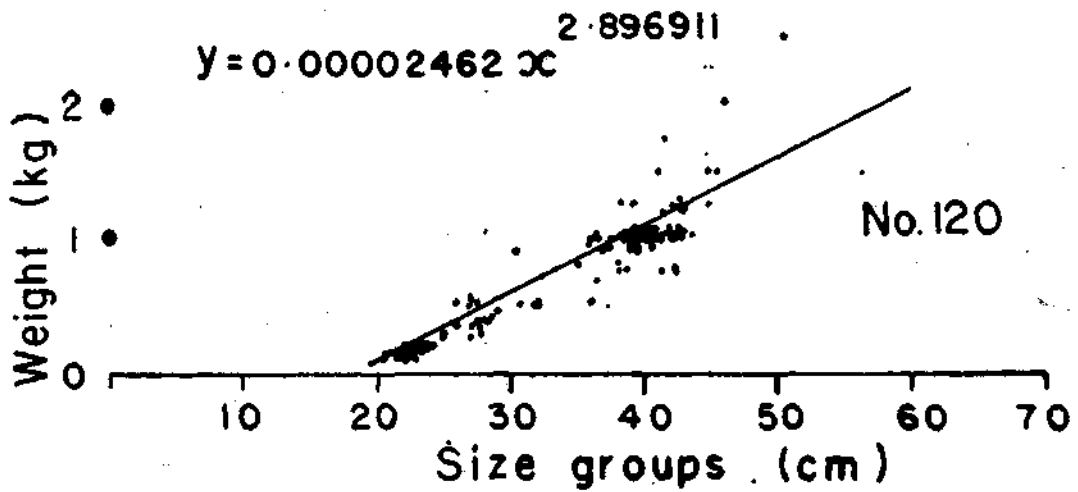
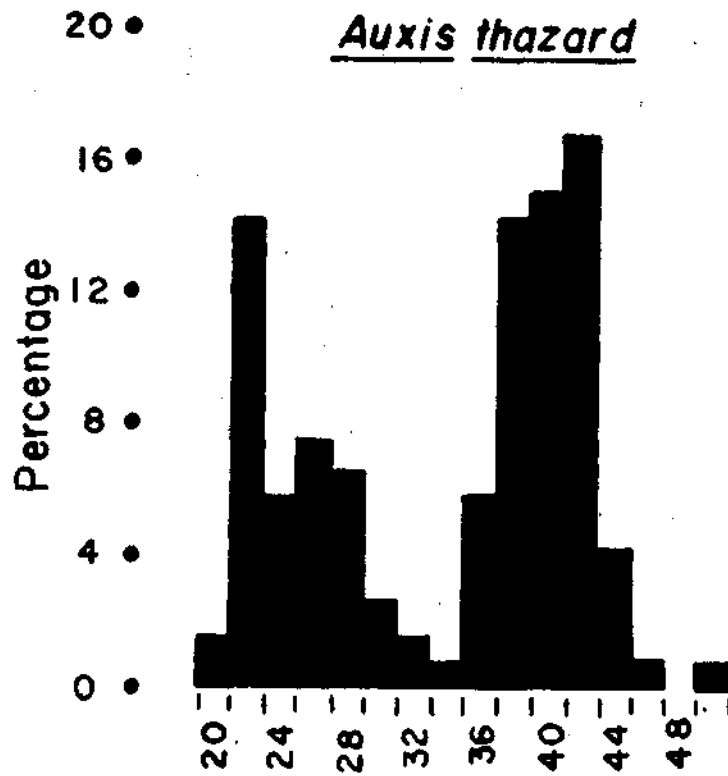


Fig. 4. Length frequency distribution (percentage) and the length-weight relationship of *A. thazard* taken during the oceanic drift gillnetting.

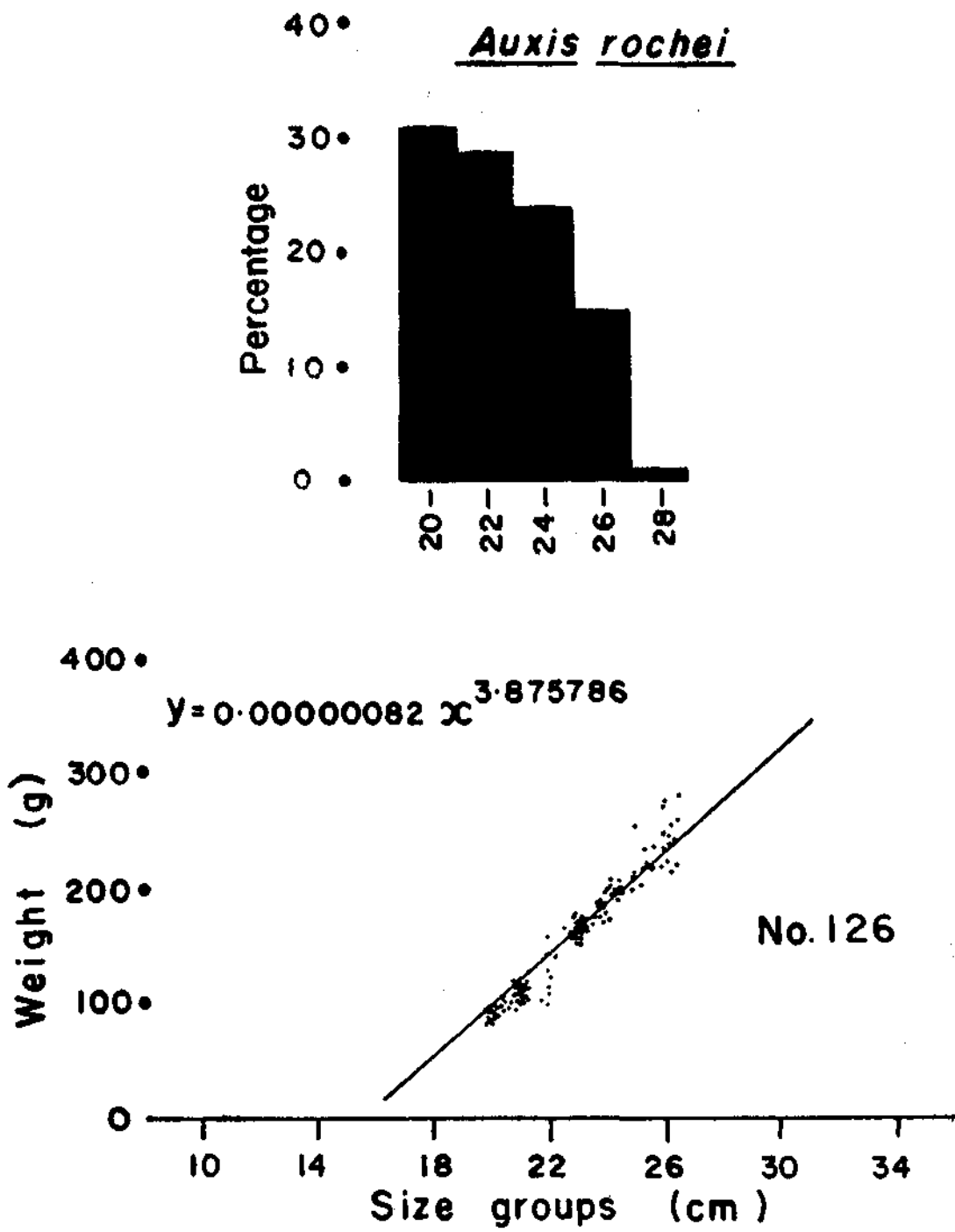


Fig. 5. Length frequency distribution (percentage) and the length-weight relationship of *A. rochei* taken during the oceanic drift gillnetting.

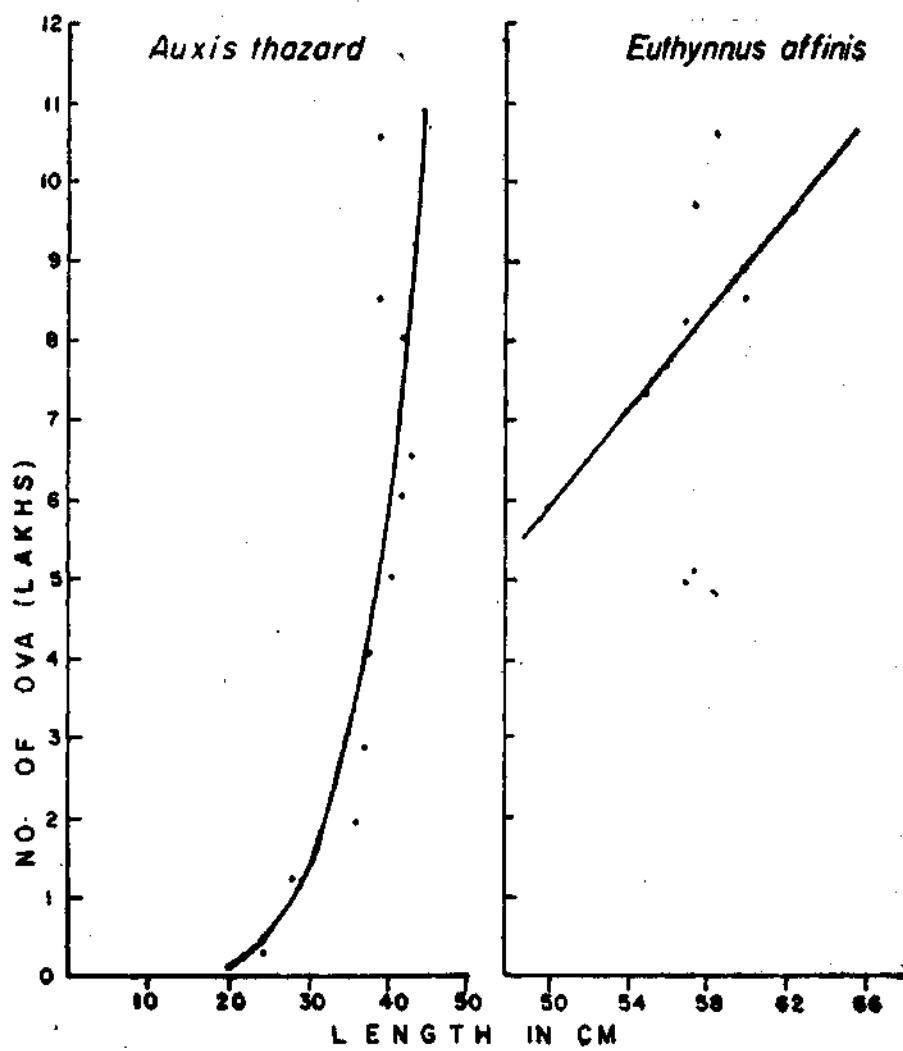


Fig. 6. Fecundity in relation to the total length of *A. thazard* and *E. affinis* taken during the oceanic drift gillnetting.

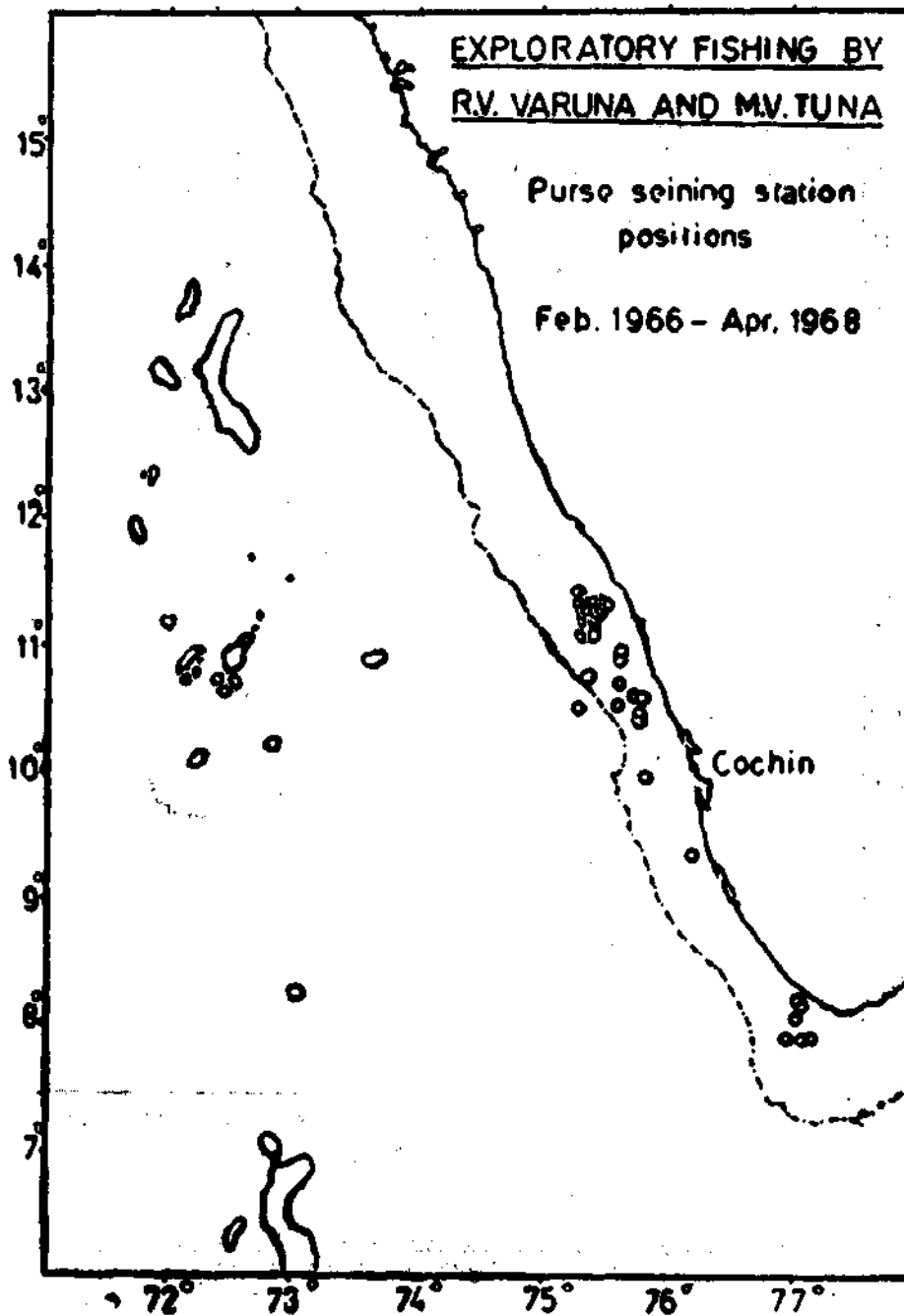


Fig. 7. R. V. *VARUNA* and M. V. *TUNA* station positions of experimental purse seining conducted during Feb., 1966-April, 1968.

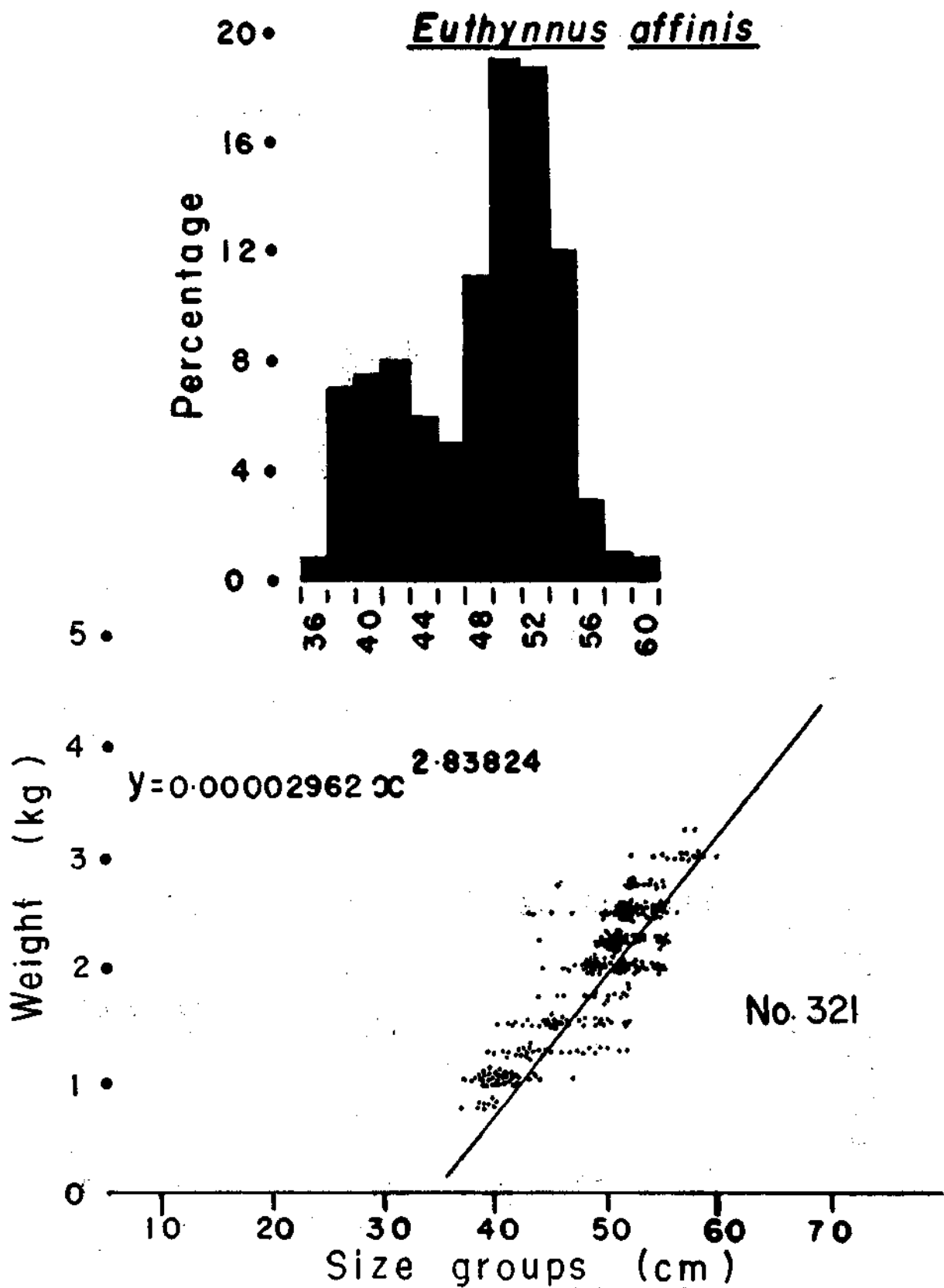


Fig. 8. Length frequency distribution (percentage) and the length-weight relationship of *E. affinis* taken during purse seining.

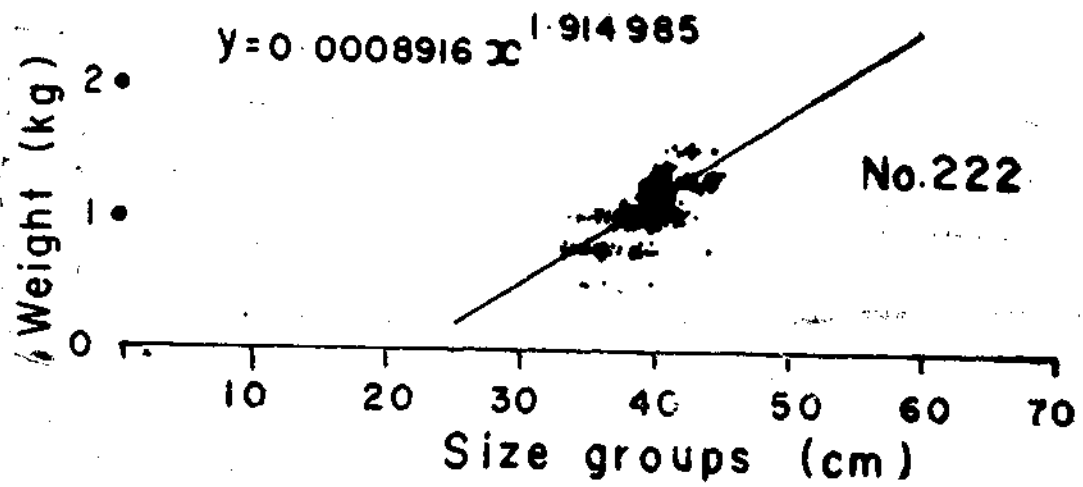
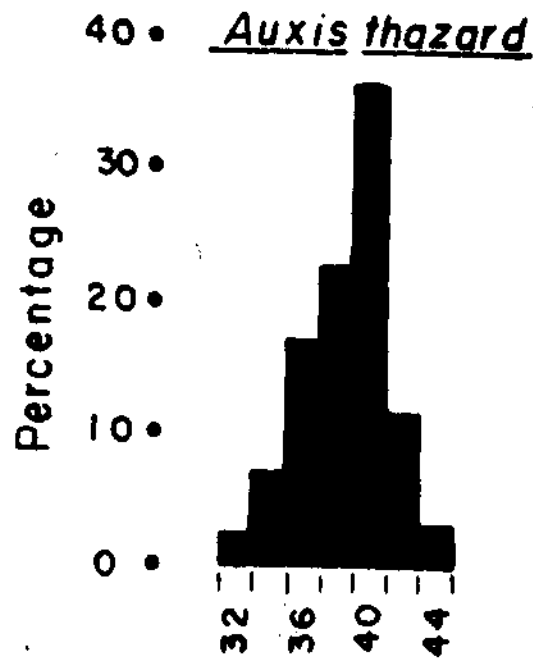


Fig. 9. Length frequency distribution (percentage) and the length-weight relationship of *A. thazard* taken during purse seining.

Length frequency of tunas collected during the drift gillnets and their length-weight relationship is presented in Fig. 2-5. The length-weight relationship of different species were as follows :

$$\begin{aligned}
 E. \text{affinis} & \quad y = 0.00057360 x^{2.07929} \\
 A. \text{thazard} & \quad y = 0.00002462 x^{2.898911} \\
 A. \text{rochei} & \quad y = 0.00000082 x^{3.875736} \\
 S. \text{orientalis} & \quad y = 0.00039446 x^{2.17519} \\
 K. \text{pelamis} & \quad y = 0.00000384 x^{3.41541}
 \end{aligned}$$

Other aspects of biology especially the fecundity (Fig. 116) worked out for different species is presented below :

	No. of ovaries examined for counts	Estimated number of ova	
		Range	Mean
<i>A. rochei</i>	4	31236 - 102902	52000
<i>A. thazard</i>	9	197223 - 1056468	601400
<i>E. affinis</i>	7	493617 - 1393882	866900
<i>S. orientalis</i>	4	268930 - 403603	354100
<i>K. pelamis</i>	1	26873	268400

EXPLORATORY PURSE SEINING

Purse seine fishing for tunas in the Lakshadweep sea was first carried out by *R. V. Varuna* in February, 1966, but was not successful. Later, in March 1967, *R. V. Varuna* and *M. V. Tuna* conducted purse seine operations with a net of 540 m long, 67 m depth and 10 mm mesh size. Although skipjack shoals were

encircled, they sounded faster and not a single fish was caught. It was observed that, for successful operations, in the oceanic areas nets of larger dimensions should be employed which could operate in relation to the thermocline. The same purse seine net was successfully operated on the shelf areas where good catches were obtained, the maximum exceeding 10 tonnes in a single operation (Fig. 7).

Out of a total of 38 purse seine operations carried out by *R. V. Varuna* and *M. V. Tuna*, the number of positive stations with tuna were only 10 for which the effort expended in hours was 39.50. The total catch amounted to 19,436 kg. The average duration of the positive operations being 3.95 hours the average catch in kg per positive operations was 1943.8 kg and catch/hour for positive hauls worked out to about 494 kg. However, these investigations have proven beyond doubt that in the coastal waters, the nets of the type used could be successfully operated and much higher catch rates could be expected.

The catch was mainly composed of *E. affinis* and *A. thazard*. *E. affinis* occurred in the size range 32-58 cm and *A. thazard* 32-46 cm. Their length frequency distribution and the length-weight relationship is presented in Figs. 8 & 9. The length-weight relationship of the two species calculated were as follows :

$$\begin{aligned}
 E. \text{affinis} & \quad y = 0.00002962 x^{2.6324} \\
 A. \text{thazard} & \quad y = 0.00089160 x^{1.191498595}
 \end{aligned}$$

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