

PROBLEMS FACING THE FISHERMEN OF THE *BECHE-DE-MER* INDUSTRY

S. AMBROSE FERNANDO

Fish Exporter's Chamber, 47 Pereira Street, Tuticorin - 628 001

ABSTRACT

The main problem facing the fishermen of the *beche-de-mer* industry is the shortage of raw material for processing. The Government of India banned in 1982 to export material less than 3" has caused further hardship to fishermen since 67% of the material processed is below 3" size. To overcome the crisis the industry should diversify and extend to other areas and also take to processing of other more valuable species. Suitable extension programmes on proper handling and processing will be very helpful to the fishermen to increase their income, besides this will help to fetch more foreign exchange for the country.

INTRODUCTION

The *beche-de-mer* industry is an ancient one introduced by the Chinese to India more than one thousand years ago. It is essentially a cottage industry based in rural areas needing very little investment. Though the industry was introduced long back it is not an organised one. The industry consists of the fishermen who are divers, the processors who act as middlemen and the exporters. Unfortunately the divers who strain most get the least returns and it is the exporters who get the lion's share in this industry.

In this paper some of the problems facing the fishermen are given and also some suggestions are given for the welfare of the fishermen. James (1989) published a good account on *beche-de-mer* resources, fishery and industry from India.

PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

The main problem facing fishermen is finance since they belong to the financially weaker section of the society. Due to lack of finance unscrupulous middle-men take advantage of their financial conditions. They often advance some money to the divers and they are obliged to hand over the sea-cucumbers to them only often at a much cheaper rate. In order to

redeem the fishermen from the clutches of the middlemen a Fishermen Co-operative Marketing Society must be formed and all the fishermen who are involved in this industry should be enrolled as members. Finance should be arranged through the society and the society should repay the money borrowed from the middlemen and the fishermen should be relieved.

An organised purchasing cell must be formed through the marketing societies to get their legitimate prices for the sea-cucumbers collected by them. At present due to the financial indebtedness the material is often sold at a lower rate. This can be avoided by organising a purchasing cell.

The fishermen should be given proper training with scientific diving equipments to stay underwater for a longer time and collect more catches. Joseph (1992) has mentioned that mostly SCUBA divers only collect the sea-cucumbers at Maldives. A training programme can be conducted for the divers to use SCUBA diving equipment.

At present the processors are using oil drums for processing. This is not a good practice since it will not allow proper boiling of the material. A saucer-shaped cast iron pan is the best one for this purpose. This has been

figured and described by James (1989). Such types of vessels can be supplied to the processors at a few selected centres to improve the quality of the product.

It is desirable to provide transport facilities from remote centres so that the material can be pooled at a big centre so that the processing can be done in a better manner.

REFERENCES

JAMES, D. B. 1989. *Beche-de-mer* : its resources, fishery and industry. *Mar. Fish. Infor. Serv., T & E. Ser.*, 92 : 1-35.

JOSEPH, L. 1992. Review of the *beche-de-mer* (Sea-cucumber) fishery in the Maldives. *BOBP/WP/79*. pp. 1-34.