

## PROSPECTS FOR ESTABLISHING A *BECHE-DE-MER* INDUSTRY IN LAKSHADWEEP

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### ABSTRACT

The paper embodies the successful results obtained from experimental trial fishing and processing of sea-cucumber resource, conducted by a private party at Androth Island during the two fair fishing seasons 1975-76 and 1976-77. The processing method used in the present experimental trial is described and discussed. The prospects, major constraints and problems faced in establishing and developing the *beche-de-mer* industry in the islands are dealt with.

### INTRODUCTION

*Beche-de-mer* industry is not established in the Lakshadweep although valuable species of sea-cucumbers are available for processing. Hornell (1917) observed some materials processed in Kiltan Island. Ayyangar (1922) also made a reference to this processing. James (1973, 1989) pointed out the good resources of *beche-de-mer* in Lakshadweep.

The availability of commercially important species of sea-cucumbers in Lakshadweep is well established. Despite lack of facilities, it is possible to establish the industry in Lakshadweep, since it is a cottage industry depending on artisanal fishery. The present paper records the results obtained from a recent survey conducted in the islands. It also probes into the problem and prospects of developing a *beche-de-mer* industry in this remote oceanic territory.

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### EXPERIMENTAL PROCESSING

Experimental processing conducted by the Lakshadweep Fisheries Department in 1968 proved that suitable sea-cucumbers are available for *beche-de-mer*. With the help of the Fisheries Department, M/s. Marine Products Exporters, Madras, started exploitation of sea-cucumbers at Androth from 10.3.'76 to the end of the fair season. The party engaged ten labourers on daily wages at the rate of Rs. 8/- per head per day for the processing work. In addition, the labourers were paid five paise on individual specimens of sea-cucumber collected and brought by local men and children. Local people other than the labourers were also paid five paise per sea-cucumber collected, towards the cost. An additional incentive of Rs. 5/- per 100 sea-cucumbers was paid. Ten more additional labourers at the rate of Rs. 8/- were employed from the second day. Till 8.4.1976, there was no departmental control over the collection.

The Department kept a watch on the collections made from 8.4.1976. From 19.3.76 to 15.4.76, a total of 75,316 sea-cucumbers were collected and processed to get 3633 kg of *beche-*

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*de-mer*. The Department got a royalty of Rs. 3633/- at the rate of Rs. 1/- per kg of *beche-de-mer* processed. The product was taken to mainland for export. This trade gave employment to about 40 labourers per day. During the 1975-76 season the sea-cucumber was found in abundant quantities very near the shore about 150 specimens distributed in an area of 100 sq. m. During the 1976-77 season (November 1976 to January 1977), however, a reduction in stock of the sea-cucumber was noticed and the work was suspended for want of sea-cucumbers. A total of only 2115 kg of *beche-de-mer* was obtained during this season, giving the Fisheries

Department a royalty of Rs. 2115/-. The method of processing however was not correct since the processing method used for sand-fish is applied to the species available in Lakshadweep.

#### REMARKS

In view of the good resources available in Lakshadweep there are excellent prospects for *beche-de-mer* industry. Proper methods of processing have to be followed to get maximum price in the export market. Care should be taken to see that over exploitation does not take place and the industry is spread to all the islands.

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