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Bumper catch of sea bass, *Lates calcarifer* (Bloch, 1790) by gill netters in Mumbai waters

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Lates calcarifer (Bloch, 1790)

Lates calcarifer is commonly called as giant sea bass, sea perch or giant brackish water perch and in Maharastra, locally known as 'Khajura' (Waghmare and Sawant, 1994). Sea bass is considered as a valuable seafood delicacy with good demand in market. They are found in coastal waters, estuaries and lagoons usually at a depth of 40 m and mainly feed on fishes and crustaceans. They are distributed around Sri Lanka extending to Arabian Sea, Eastern India Ocean and the Western Central Pacific (Fischer and Bianchi, 1984).

The species is observed in the fish catch throughout the year but in very few numbers with large sized fishes caught during April - June. An unprecedented high catch of this species was landed at Sassoon Dock on 25-04-08. Thirteen gill netters landed about 80-100 kg of sea bass per boat using wagra jal of mesh size 120 mm after fishing for a day. The fishing ground was off Worli at a depth range of 15-20 m. The boats were plank built fitted with 15 HP 3-cylinder engine. These boats are basically from Cuffe parade and they unload their catch at Sassoon Dock. The catch was sold at the rate of Rs. 1,380 to 2,200 per fish as each fish approximately weighed between 5.5 kg to 8.5 kg. Other species landed included *Protonibea diacanthus*, *Otolithoides biauratus* and *Eleutheronema tetradactylum.*

Landings of this species in such a magnitude are rare and hence the present observation gains importance. A total of 52 specimens were measured and it was observed that the total length ranged between 80-121 cm with a mode in the length group 90-99 cm (Fig. 1). It was observed that this species is generally caught in good numbers during full moon and new moon days. The present catch also followed the same phenomenon. From this, it can be inferred that for the maximum exploitation of this species lunar cycle may be followed.

A similar high catch was recorded by Subbrao (2002) from Orissa in the month of February. A total of 192 numbers of sea bass with a total weight of

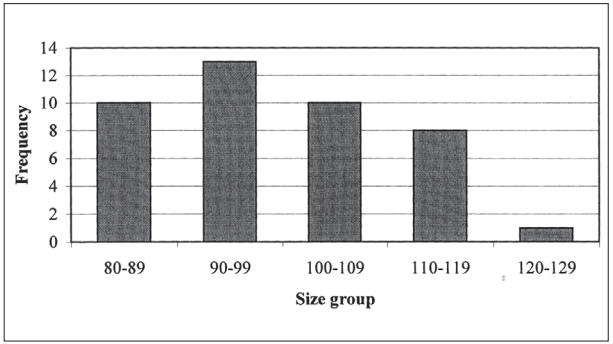

Fig. 1. Legth-frequency of *Lates calcarifer* landed at Sassoon Dock

4,816 kg was caught by two operations of shore seine. According to Fisher and Bianchi (1984), the fishery of sea bass is seasonal and the maximum length of the species in 200 cm. A large sized sea bass measuring 106 cm and weighing 7.5 kg was caught from Karwar coast by shore seine (Dharchwar, 1998). In the present catch, the maximum size recorded was 121 cm.

In view of its easy adaptability to low saline waters, this fish has assumed great value for culture in recent years. Owing to its fast growth, high quality flesh, high market value and export potential, sea bass is an important species cultured in Thailand, Singapore and Philippines. Bensam and Nammalwar (1991) reported on the potential for commercial culture of the species in Indian waters. Cage culture of sea bass was initiated at Visakhapatnam wherein about 550 kg was successfully harvested. Majority of the harvested fishes were above 300 g and about 10% were about 1 kg (Anon, 2008). The availability of this species in such a magnitude from Mumbai waters suggests that sea bass culture can be taken up in Maharastra waters.