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Occurrence of the deep sea crab, *Thalamita crenata* in shallow water gillnet (mural valai) operation at Tharuvaikulam, north of Tuticorin

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The deep sea crab, *Thalamita crenata* mostly inhabit only deeper waters (>100 m) and occur in deep sea gillnet operations along with fishes like hemiramphids, belonids and *Exocetus* spp. as stray catches. It never formed a fishery and did not gain any economical importance.

However, occurrence of, *T. crenata* was noticed at 20 m depth in mural valai, a type of drift gill net having mesh size of 50 mm at a catch rate of 75 to 100 kg per unit at Tharuvaikulam, north of Tuticorin. Generally, the fishermen leave during night between 20 00 and 24 00 hrs and return to the shore around 12 00 hrs, the following day. At Tharuvaikulam, around 40 - 60 units of mural valai, are being operated every day except on Sundays with a manpower of 4 - 5 per unit. During January - July, they undertake this type of operation up to a depth of 200 m and bring good amount of hemiramphids, belonids, *Exocetus* spp. barracuda, scomberoids, chirocentrids, small sized groupers, lethrinids, lutjanids and *Coryphaena* spp. However, in the month of August 2003, the weather being unfavourable, the fishermen did not venture into the deeper waters; instead they restricted operations within 20 m depth. To their surprise, *T. crenata* alone

were caught in huge quantity. The size of these crabs ranged from 50 - 52 mm for males and 45 - 47 mm for females weighing 10 - 20 g per crab.

Despite having no commercial value, they do cause lot of damage to the fishing gear by way of cutting the net using their chelae, which renders financial loss to fishermen. Once the gear is noticed during the course of fishing operation with the said crab in huge quantity, immediately the gear will be hauled up and with the help of wooden sticks these crabs will be broken into pieces and removed. Otherwise the entire gear will be dashed up, against the sides of the boat systematically so as to break the crab shell in order to overcome the damage which can be caused by these crabs to the gear.

On some occasions, even the fishing is likely to be suspended for few days for the fear of damage to the gear by these crabs. Exact reason for their migration from deeper waters to inshore waters is not known. The migration might have taken place due to the sudden changes in the environment or they may be searching better feeding ground which is yet to be confirmed.