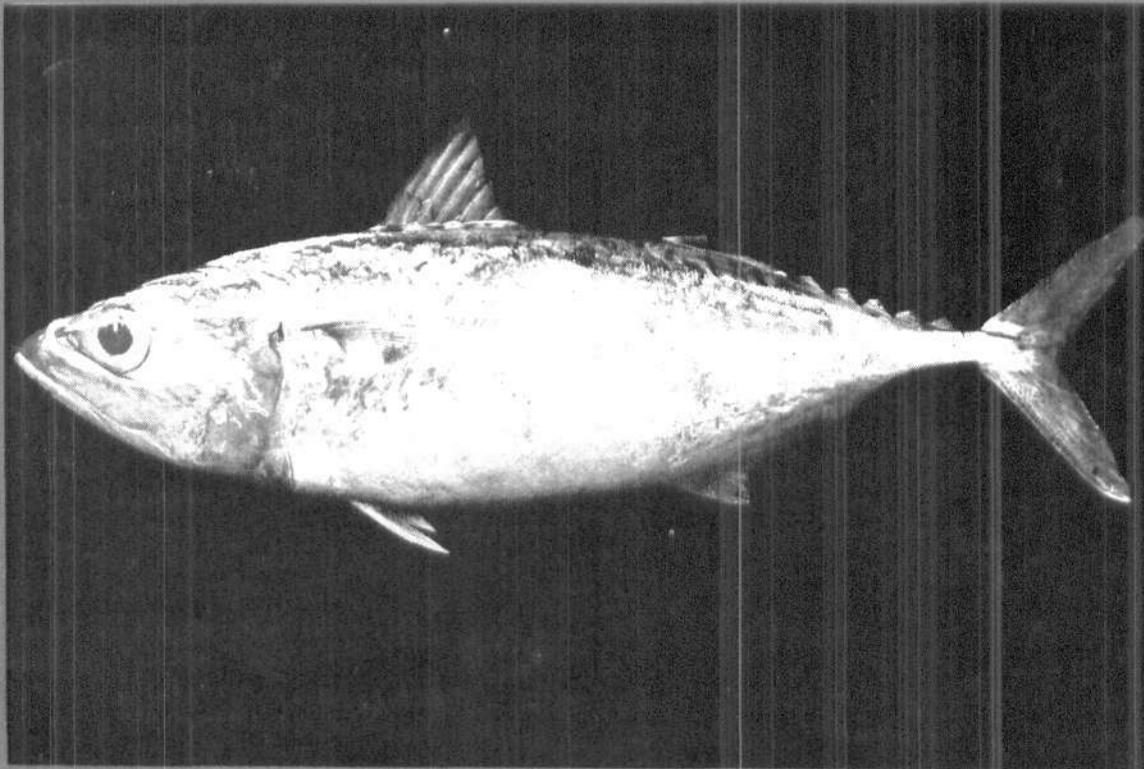




MARINE FISHERIES INFORMATION SERVICE



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THE MARINE FISHERIES INFORMATION SERVICE: Technical and Extension Series envisages the rapid dissemination of information on marine and brackish water fishery resources and allied data available with the National Marine Living Resources Data Centre (NMLRDC) and the Research Divisions of the Institute, results of proven researches for transfer of technology to the fish farmers and industry and of other relevant information needed for Research and Development efforts in the marine fisheries sector.

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MARINE FISHERY OF WEST BENGAL COAST*

Introduction

West Bengal has a coastline of 120 km spread over the districts of Midnapur and 24 Parganas lying on either side of the mouth of river Hooghly. Marine fisheries here up to fifties were confined to the operation of a few bag nets, shore seines, stake nets and some seine nets. The fishing activities continued for three months in a year from mid-October to middle of January. Fishermen from erstwhile East Pakistan

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settled in Musidabad and Naidia districts introduced monofilament drift nets in the sixties, and revolutionised the fishing industry. Consequently the fishing season extended from July to March and fishermen belonging to Hooghly and Howrah also started fishing in sea. Mechanisation of countrycrafts with bag nets, drift nets and seine nets followed in seventies and boosted the catch, and people of many other community also came into the fray. Trawling is not yet in vogue, although trawlers based at Vishakhapatnam regularly fish in this coast.

Fishing bases and landing centres

There are only a few marine fishing villages along West Bengal coast. Fishermen from interior villages, however, come down during season time to coastal areas and establish temporary fishing bases. About eight such bases namely Disha, Jadha, Kharpai and Junput in Midnapur District, and Frazergunj, Bakkhali, Jamboo and Handi Bhanga in 24 Parganas District are usually formed. Normally landings take place in these bases. Apart from them, landings occur at Fatta, Diamond Harbour, Kakdwip and Nambhana in 24 Parganas District. Catches from fishing grounds are transported by mechanised carrier boats and landed.

Fishing crafts

Clinker built boat called *Patia* or *Paukhia* without deck are used for operating shore seine and drift nets and carved built boats called *Salti* with deck made of bamboo splits are used in the operation of bag nets, and *Chot* with deck made of wooden planks and often mechanised with engines varying from 7.5 to 120 h.p. according to sizes are used in the operation of drift nets and seine nets.

Fishing gear

1. Bag net

(a) *Behundi jal*: There are different types of tackles under this group. They are operated against current to catch fish through filtration. Nets meant for bottom and surface differ in their design and mode of operation. When some are used for fishing throughout the year, others are restricted to seasons. There are types earmarked for fishing according to lunar phases.

The fishes caught in *Behundi jals* are sciaenids, anchovies, *Thrissocles*, *Setipinna*, *Coila*, *Harpodon nehereus*, *Parapenaeopsis* sp., *Metapenaeus* spp., *Acetes* sp., and squids.

(b) *Panch kati cool jal*: This is also a conical net fixed against the current with the help of five bamboo poles and hence the name. Presently this is found only at Junput and it is used for fishing in spring tide throughout the year. Catches are similar to that of *Behundi jals*.

2. Drift net

Locally known as *bhasani* or *chandi jal* are now in extensive use at Digha, Saula, Junput, Bakkhali and

Frazergunj. Decron is used for making the net at all places except Digha where tyre cord forms the raw material. Drift nets operate for about 10 days a month from June to September and 20 days a month from October to March depending on weather conditions. Catch by the drift nets constitute mainly of *Hilsa ilisha*, *Scomberomorus guttatus*, *Stromateus argentius*, *Arius* spp. and *Osteogobius militaris*. There are about 150 non-mechanised and 380 mechanised units with decron nets and about 70 mechanised units with tyre cord nets in this coast.

3. Seine nets ('Kachal')

Six country crafts with the net and a mechanised boat make one unit. The boat tows the country crafts to the grounds searching for *Hilsa*. When shoals are sighted, they are soon encircled by the net, and the foot rope is pulled up and made into a bag with the fish in. Soon after hauling, the fish is taken to Diamond Harbour or Calcutta. Apart from *Hilsa*, cat fish, pomfret and seer fish are also caught in this net. The operation of this net is restricted to October–February period. There are about 40 units based along the coast of Midnapur. The average annual catch per unit is 20 tonnes.

4. Shore seine ('Sarini')

The shore seines are used only at Digha and Chandpur area. There are about 44 units and the average annual catch per net is 20 tonnes. The fish caught are mainly sciaenids, *Thrissocles*, *Setipinna*, *Coila*, juvenile pomfrets, *Leiognathus*, polynemids and cat fishes. Sometimes the cat fish are caught in shoals.

Constraints in fishing activities

Bulk of the catch in the coast come through mechanised sector. But lack of berthing and mooring facilities stand in the way of expansion of fishing fleets. Boats are anchored in the open waters and catches transferred to canoes and ferried to the shore especially at Digha, Junput and Frazergunj. Same difficulty is faced to take provisions, fishing implements etc. to the boat. In none of the landing centres there is adequate jetty facility. Construction of jetties is therefore an immediate need.

A number of boats anchored in the sea are lost every year during rough weather that suddenly bursts. Canals in the area are silted and not suited for navigation. If bar mouths of the canals are periodically dredged and kept good for passage, most of them can form

safe bases for fishing vessels and more people will venture forward to invest in fishing. Landmarks with signal lights in the bases are lacking now and their installation will assist navigation particularly at night.

Jadha, the largest fishing base of the coast is not connected by road. There is no cold storage or ice factory near about. As a result the catch is sun dried on beach when scarcity for fresh fish is acute in the nearby Calcutta market. At present there are only three small ice factories with a total installed capacity of 37 tonnes and it is too meagre to meet the needs of the area. An ice plant with cold storage facility in a central place like Balisai will boost the industry. Proper approach roads are also lacking. Drying fish on bamboo mats or on cement platforms will improve the quality of the

products. Facilities for this now not available should also be developed without fail.

Fiazergunj and Bakkhali, where 242 mechanised boats operate do not have a workshop near about. The vessels are to be taken to Calcutta for even small repairs at the expense of many fishing days and money. Establishment of a full-fledged workshop will step up fishing days and increase production.

A couple of years ago, a few 9.6 m Tamil Nadu trawlers were supplied to different co-operative societies by the Government of West Bengal. But from the beginning they have been used either as gill netters or carriers. Trawling is never tried here by the fishermen. It would be helpful if Government train up local fishermen in it and encourage trawling.

