

# FISHERIES OF THE WEST COAST OF INDIA

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## FISH MARKETING

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FISH marketing technique includes the practices of actual handling of the fish, preservation and storage, processing, transport, manufacture of by-products and delivery to the consumer. These practices are not so simple especially owing to the highly perishable nature of the commodity and the unfavourable conditions of the environment and climate in our country.

*Production and utilisation.*—The present annual production of fish in India has exceeded one million tons due to the efforts of the Government of India and the various States' Governments in implementing comprehensive programmes for the development of the fishing industry based on surveys and expansion of fishing areas, initiation and co-ordination of biological and technological researches, conservation and judicious exploitation, introduction of small mechanised boats and larger power vessels, supply of fishery requisites to fishermen, organisation of fish trade and improvement in the socio-economic condition of the fishermen. The present *per capita* consumption of fish in the country is estimated to be about 3·9 lbs.

*Present state of marketing.*—The fish trade in India is not very well organised. There are a number of limiting factors inherent in the general social and economic environment which are acute owing to the special nature and location of the fishing operations and the highly unstable character of the commodity. The fishing centres are scattered along the coastline or diffused over inland areas, and are therefore not easily accessible. Facilities for handling, storing and processing and means of communication and transport are either very limited or absent. The primary producer continues to be poor, ignorant and indebted. His earnings are low, as immediately on landing he has to sell cheap or lose his catch. He is dependent on the fish merchants for financial assistance to support him during the slack seasons, and also for the disposal of his catches. As the catch is the only security for loans advanced, the merchant is able to determine the fisherman's earnings, irrespective of the volume of his catch. The merchant exercises control over such distribution facilities as exist and extracts the maximum profit

from his limited turnover. There is much wastage of effort in the arrangements for the collection and disposal of supplies. Fishermen are not yet associated together in effective co-operative effort. The public's demand for fish is also restrained by low levels of purchasing power and is based on undue preferences for certain species and varieties which derive from unfamiliarity, ignorance and prejudice. The fish markets are congested and unhygienic and do not attract sufficient customers.

*Need for improvements.*—There is urgent need for removing the obstacles to expansion and to introduce a competitive element into fish marketing. Co-ordinated measures for improvements in production and distribution from the fisherman to the consumer are necessary. The important among these to be considered on the marketing side are: (a) arrangements for assembling catches from all fishing centres; (b) provision of facilities for processing (especially salting and drying) and storage of supplies for which there is no adequate local demand; (c) provision and better use of communication and transport facilities, especially to bring areas of shortage within reach of existing supplies; (d) promotion of domestic and export markets through trade and consumer education; (e) improvement of practices in handling, packing and processing; and (f) researches on preservation and processing under conditions prevailing in the country; and (g) regulation and close supervision of marketing practices. These measures may be implemented by individual enterprises, especially under the stimulus of special incentives such as credit facilities or subsidies. But at the initial stages of development, Government have to help the fishermen. Since recently, the State Governments are assisting the fishermen to play their due share for increasing fish-production and distribution through the co-operative movement which is gaining popularity among them. Through these co-operatives the fishermen are given loans and subsidies towards credit facilities for the elimination of their dependence on money-lenders and middlemen, purchase of domestic as well as production requirements, construction of curing sheds, godowns and markets and for transporting and marketing their produce. There is now particular interest throughout the country in using Government sponsored co-operative schemes to give the fishermen an interest in marketing and an opportunity to bring about improvement as well as to introduce more efficient and competitive methods into the fish trade. But these activities have to be intensified for obtaining quicker results.

*Marketing of fish catches of the west coast.*—The west coast of India is rich in pelagic and mid-water fisheries, and accounts for seventy per cent.

of the total landings in the country. The marketing problem along this belt is acute, especially for want of roads to landing centres and of adequate storage and transport facilities. The few ice-plants and cold-storages along the coast are wholly inadequate for the proper preservation and storage of the catches. A large portion of the latter is therefore salted and dried, facilities for which also are not sufficient and satisfactory. The most urgent necessity for improving fresh fish trade in this sector is the availability of plenty of cheap ice at all important landing centres, inexpensive insulated transport containers, and insulated road and rail wagons. Early steps have to be taken to provide these immediate requirements. Apart from fishermen co-operatives, fish sales unions have to be organised for attending to the selling of catches and helping to finance the co-operatives.

The fishing industry in India has a good future for expansion provided proper attention is paid not only to increasing production but also to all aspects of marketing.