

Harvest of open sea cage farmed Asian Sea Bass *Lates calcarifer* — at Chemmencherry near Chennai

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The Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute has reached yet another milestone in the promotion of sea cage farming activities along the Indian coast with the successful demonstration of open sea floating cage farming of the Asian sea bass *Lates calcarifer* off the Chennai coast. A grand Harvest Mela was organised at Chemmencherry fishing village near Kovalam on 3rd August 2010. Mr. K.P.P. Samy, Hon'ble Minister for Fisheries, Tamil Nadu, inaugurated the Mela in the presence of Dr. G. Syda Rao, Director, C.M.F.R.I., Dr. A.G. Ponniah, Director, Central Institute of Brackishwater Aquaculture (C.I.B.A.), Dr. M. Sakthivel, President, Aquaculture Foundation of India (A.F.I.), Dr. G. Mohanraj, Scientist-in-charge, Madras Research Centre of C.M.F.R.I., Mr. Thillai Govindan, Joint Director, Tamil Nadu State Fisheries Department., Mr. S. Janakiraman, President, Kovalam Panchayat, Mr. Fernando, Proprietor, Victoria Sea Foods, and other dignitaries and representatives from different R&D organisations, State and Central Departments and media persons.



Hon'ble Minister Mr. K.P.P. Samy and Dr. G. Syda Rao, Director, C.M.F.R.I. holding up the harvested sea bass.



Fig 1: Open sea cage holding sea bass in the sea off Chemmencherry



Fig 2: Press Conference attended by Dr. G. Syda Rao, Director, C.M.F.R.I., Dr. A.G. Ponniah, Director, C.I.B.A. and Dr. M. Sakthivel, President, A.F.I., before the harvest.



Fig 3: C.M.F.R.I. staff and fishermen of Chemmencherry preparing for the harvest.



Fig 4: Harvesting the fish.



Fig 5: Holding up the first lot of harvested fish.



Fig 6: Dr. G. Syda Rao, Director, C.M.F.R.I. returning with the first lot of harvested fish.



Fig 8: Fisherwomen of Chemmencherry holding up the harvested sea bass.



Fig 9: Bringing in batches of harvested sea bass



Fig 10: Weighing and packing of harvested sea bass



Fig 11: Presentation of DD by Dr. P. Krishnaiah, Chief Executive, N.F.D.B., to Mr. S. Janakiraman, President, Kovalam Panchayat



Fig 12: Jubilant Chemmencherry fishermen with DD

G. Mohanraj, Scientist-in-charge, Madras Research Centre of C.M.F.R.I., welcomed the gathering and gave a brief account of the activities of C.M.F.R.I. Dr. G. Syda Rao, in his Presidential Address, saying that there was good scope for the progress of cage farming activities along the Tamil Nadu coast, requested the State Fisheries Department to volunteer support in creating awareness among different fishing communities and villages. He thanked the press and media for the interest shown in covering the activities since this was an important step necessary for popularisation of the activity. Hon'ble Minister Mr. K.P.P. Samy, in his Inaugural Address, expressed great happiness for having been a part of the mega-event and at having witnessed the harvest. Commending the achievement, which he said that C.M.F.R.I. and the fishermen of Chemmencherry had successfully demonstrated this technology of farming by working in unison, he promised full-fledged support from the Tamil Nadu State Government towards launching open sea cages along the Tamil Nadu coast. He also appreciated the fishermen of Chemmencherry for having come forward to work in unison with C.M.F.R.I.

Before the harvest, a press conference was held. Dr. G. Syda Rao, Director, C.M.F.R.I., Dr. A.G. Ponniah, Director, C.I.B.A. and Dr. M. Sakthivel, President, A.F.I. Dr. Rao briefed the media persons at the conference about the activities of C.M.F.R.I., and the thrust on developing open sea mariculture to boost the national marine fish production and to offer an auxiliary livelihood support for the fishermen, particularly during periods of fishing ban. He said that C.M.F.R.I. had initiated cage farming activities in 2007 at Visakhapatnam and following successful demonstration, took up the activity as a National Project with fund support from the National Fisheries Development Board (N.F.D.B.), Hyderabad. While the thrust at the moment is on sea cage farming of sea bass, cobia and lobsters, C.M.F.R.I. is also striving to develop cage farming technologies for milkfish, mullets, red snappers and large croakers. Having obtained good harvest results of lobsters at Mandapam and Kanyakumari and promising results for sea bass at Karwar, C.M.F.R.I., has also been working to develop innovative and cost-effective models for open sea cages. An important aspect of sea cage farming is the availability of seed for stocking. While the

experiments carried out so far have depended on other agencies for seed, the success achieved by C.M.F.R.I. in breeding of cobia at Mandapam holds promise for future cage farming activities with the seed by CMFRI at its own facility. He highlighted the role played by the fishermen in carrying out the open sea cage farming activities and said that this would provide additional employment opportunities to sustain rural livelihoods.

Dr. A.G. Ponniah described the features of sea bass aquaculture and its extensibility. He also briefed the media persons on the role of C.I.B.A. in seed production and farming of sea bass in brackishwater systems. Dr. M. Sakthivel said that the venture initiated by C.M.F.R.I. held much of scope for popularisation in all the coastal States. He appreciated the stability of the open sea cage design and also highlighted the importance of developing suitable cage farming technologies for different species.

The dignitaries and media persons went to the site of the cage in FRP boats to witness the first harvesting by the staff of Madras Research Centre of C.M.F.R.I. and the fishermen of Chemmencherry. Dr.

Dr. A.G. Ponniah, Director, C.I.B.A, Mr. Thillai Govindan, Jt. Director, Tamil Nadu State Fisheries Department, and Mr. Fernando, Proprietor, Victoria Sea foods, offered felicitations on the occasion. They commended the efforts made by C.M.F.R.I. and its laudable achievement through successful demonstration of sea cage farming of sea bass at Chemmencherry.

Dr. Joe K. Kizhakudan, Senior Scientist and Officer-in-charge of the Kovalam Field Laboratory of C.M.F.R.I. thanked the dignitaries and the C.M.F.R.I.-Fishermen team that strived to make the demonstration a successful one. The



fishermen involved in the cage farming activities were felicitated and honoured with mementos by the dignitaries.

The harvest was completed in two days. The gross production from a stocking biomass of 0.5 t, after 6 months of rearing, exceeded 3.5 t. The fish were sold at prices ranging from Rs.180/- to Rs. 200/- per kg.

The sale proceeds from the harvest, amounting to Rs. 5,02,000/- were handed over to the fishermen of Chemmencherry by Dr. P. Krishnaiah, Chief Executive, N.F.D.B. at a separate function held in the Madras RC of CMFRI, Chennai on 9th August 2010. Dr. G. Mohanraj, Scientist-in-charge, Madras Research Centre of

CMFRI presided over the function. Dr. G. Gopakumar, Head, Mariculture Division & Scientist-in-charge, Mandapam Regional Centre of CMFRI, Dr. E.V. Radhakrishnan, Head, Crustacean Fisheries Division, CMFRI, Kochi and Dr. E. Vivekanandan, Principal Scientist, Madras Research Centre of CMFRI were also present. On behalf of the fishermen of Chemmencherry, Mr. S. Janakiraman, President, Kovalam Panchayat received the demand draft.

Dr. P. Krishnaiah briefed the fishermen on the developmental plans of NFDB for promoting open sea cage farming by the fishermen. Highlighting

the success of the cage farming demonstration programme being carried out by C.M.F.R.I. in different maritime States of the country, he laid emphasis on the role of the fishermen in adopting and carrying out this innovative method of increasing fish production. He invited suggestions from the fishermen which would help them to take up the activity in due course with financial aid from NFDB and technical support from CMFRI. He said that the NFDB would be ready to support the fishermen with up to 40% of the capital investment. He also said that steps were being taken to encourage the involvement of the banking and insurance sectors in this venture. ☺☺☺