

SRI LANKA'S FISHERIES RESOURCES, DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT IN THE PAST

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Introduction

Reported evidence of significant events in the fishing industry, such as the introduction of Pole and line fishery for tuna, to Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Maldives and Minicoy - Laccadive islands, by traders sailing between the Middle-east and the far-east, indicates that fishing was very active in Sri Lanka, even a couple of centuries ago. Sri Lankan, traditional fisheries concentrated primarily in the lagoons, estuaries and inshore waters but introduction of pole and line fishery (live-bait fishery) during that era, encouraged them to go into the deep-sea areas adjacent to the edge of the continental shelf, for tuna fish, with their large outrigger canoe. This also enabled them to take up to tuna longlining also from these canoes, even before the motorization programme. Further, Sri Lankan fishermen have exhibited their enterprising qualities and their motivation by the ease with which they not only adapted to new technology but also by the initiative and motivation they have exhibited by their innovative fishing technological demonstrations such as the pioneering use of large mesh synthetic gillnet for catching tunas, combined operation of gillnet cum longline, venturing into the Oceanic ranges on small motorized crafts with significant endurance and the adoption of trammelnetting for shrimps. These fishermen have been responsible for the major progressive steps taken for the development of fisheries in the recent past.

Fisheries in the Past

There were more kinds of fishing methods in the past than now. Primary gear in the past was the beach seine considered the backbone of the industry. In addition there were many craft engaged in bottom set gillnetting, bottom longlining, handlining, using inter-tidal traps, set-nets, set bagnets, stake nets with mainly demersal fish as their target. In fact mother-ship type of operations were also conducted by using motorized vessels to tow a fleet of traditional crafts (Rs.6 to 10/day/craft), far out, to conduct handling, bottom set gillnet and bottom longline operations. Side by side with the traditional fisheries, large scale bottom-trawling was introduced, in Sri Lanka, as early as 1928, by a private company that was subsequently liquidated in 1935, purely because they could not find a market for their catch. However, the Fisheries Department recommenced a steady trawl fishery, after the second World War, which became the forerunner of the large fleet operated by the Ceylon Fisheries Corporation, until the trawling ground (Wadge Bank) was lost to India, consequent to the establishment of the EEZ.

Besides these, other valuable and export oriented fisheries such as the Window-pane oyster fishery since the 1930s, Chank and Pearl-oyster fisheries, from earlier times, have virtually disappeared. The seaweed fishery, set bagnet fishery for shrimps and Beach de mer fishery have declined