



Marine Fisheries Information Service



Technical and Extension Series

Number 200
April - June 2009



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Pufferfish *Lagocephalus inermis* - an emerging fishery along Mangalore coast of Karnataka

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Lagocephalus *inermis* (Temminck & Schlegel, 1850) commonly known as smooth blaasop, belongs to the family Tetraodontidae and order Tetraodontiformes. This fish was considered as a

menace by fishermen during the previous year (2006) as it caused damage to other species landed and the net. In 2007, this fish gained attention as a new fishery resource along the coast. An estimated

landing of 74 t was recorded in 2006 which increased to 488 t in 2007. The fish is caught by multiday trawlers going for fishing for 8-10 days from a depth range of 20-100 m. The fish is caught during night trawling and is said to be moving in shoals. The peak fishery was in December 2007 with a landing of 222 t.

Investigations were carried out on the biology of the fish. The length of the fish ranged from 27 to 420 mm with modes between 340 and 360 mm and weight ranged from 260 to 760 g with an average weight of 510 g. All the fishes examined were in mature condition. Largest size recorded for the fish was 90 cm (SL).

Pufferfishes are sold at the harbour at the rate of Rs. 8-10 per kg. The fish is beheaded, viscera removed, the skin peeled off and then cured in salt (ratio 3:1) for one week. It is then dried in the sun for

a day and is transported to Kerala as cured and dried product. After processing the fish fetch a price of Rs. 30 - 45 per kg. The head and the viscera together form about 60% of the fish weight.

Pufferfishes are known for its poison tetrodotoxin (TTX), which is neurotoxic and considered to be the most toxic poison found in nature. It is generally known that liver and ovary are the organs where the toxin is concentrated in most cases, but lesser amount could also be found in skin, muscle and blood. Although the fish is poisonous, Japanese prepare a dish from the pufferfish which is called "Fugu". Despite the risk involved, if prepared properly, "Fugu" remains a Japanese delicacy and is the most popular dish in Japanese cuisine.

Detailed investigations on the biology, food and feeding and toxicity are being carried out at the centre.