

## Brief Communications

# Evolving market chains for Indian oil sardine

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Indian oil sardine, *Sardinella longiceps* forms a major catch of traditional fisherman in Kerala throughout the year. After the peak landing of nearly four lakh tonnes in 2012, catches have showed a continuous decline to less than 50000 t in 2019. This trend has adversely affected the livelihoods of thousands of traditional fishermen. Oceanographic changes associated with *El Niño* has been identified as one of the reasons for this decline in sardine catches along the Kerala coast (Rohit *et al.*, 2018). With high demand for oil sardine and limited supply from local fishery, oil sardine from from Tamil Nadu is mainly entering the Kerala fish market. Until recently, oil sardine was a non-targeted fishery resource in Tamil Nadu, but with a large and sustained demand from Kerala, a targeted fishery has emerged in Tamil Nadu especially in Puducherry, Cuddalore, Mayiladuthurai, Nagapattinam and Ramanathapuram

districts. Information gathered from different sources and field observations indicate gillnet as the main gear used to exploit oil sardine followed by trawls and ring seines. Earlier trucks registered in Tamil Nadu were used for transporting oil sardine to Kerala. Presently trucks registered in Kerala are directly collecting oil sardine from major landing centres of Tamil Nadu. Freshly caught oil sardines directly iced and packed in plastic boxes with a capacity of 30 - 35 kg per box are loaded in trucks with a loading capacity of 200 boxes (approximately 7 tonnes). While oil sardine price in Tamil Nadu was very low (₹10 - 30 per kg), increase in demand from Kerala has led to a sharp increase in the price (₹90 - 130 per kg). Loaded trucks reach major wholesale markets in Kerala (mainly Punnappra in Alapuzha, Vypin in Ernakulam, Chettuva in Thrissur, Ponnani in Malapuram and Chombala in Kozhikode districts of Kerala) early in the morning. These



Fig. 1 Loading of Oil sardine in trucks from Kerala at Cuddalore, Tamil Nadu

are then distributed to the wholesale dealers for a rate of ₹150 - 190 per kg. These are washed and sorted based on size and freshness and sold in the local market for a price of ₹220 - 330 per kg.

Oil sardines from Tamil Nadu look like the typical oil sardine with high oil content and rounded body that used to be harvested off Kerala coast in earlier times. This is contrary to past history when most of the oil sardine coming from Tamil Nadu were very lean and

poor in oil content which had poor acceptance among the fish consumers in Kerala. Distributors now market oil sardine from Tamil Nadu as typical Kerala oil sardine, earning considerable margins as prices in Tamil Nadu are comparatively much lower due to little consumer preference there.

## Reference

Rohit, P. *et al.*, 2018. *CMFRI Special Publication* No. 130, 156p.