

# Oyster picking in Alambarai Creek



Woman picking oysters

During the course of a survey conducted in the first week of June by ferry boat in the Alambarai creek (Chinna Cuddalore area, Tamil Nadu) to study the availability of fish seed suitable for cage culture operations, clam beds (*Meretrix casta*) and oyster beds (*Crassostrea madrasensis* and *Saccostrea cucullata*) were observed in the creek.

There is a thriving sustenance fishery for oysters in the creek. Oyster picking is a trade practiced year-round in the area by a group of about 15 people, predominantly women of Kotte Kadu village, who do not belong to the fishermen community. This process is completely manual and does not involve the use of any craft or gear.

The oysters are collected from the oyster beds at a depth of 1.5 fathoms. The toes of the right foot wrapped in cloth are used to pick up the oyster clutches from the oyster bed. The oyster clutch is then held in the gloved left hand and a sickle-shaped knife held in the right hand is used to pry open the oyster shell and remove the meat on site. The meat is collected in a palm leaf basket strapped to the back of the oyster pickers. The mean meat weight of an oyster is 2.3 g; smaller oysters are spared. Approximately 1.5-2 kg of oyster meat is usually collected per day per person. The meat is measured using a cylindrical box about 20 cm in height (which can hold approximately 1 kg of oyster meat, and sold to a trader @ Rs. 100/box. On an average, each picker earns an income of about Rs. 150-200/day.

(Reported by Vidya Jayasankar,  
Joe K. Kizhakudan and C. Manibal,  
Madras RC of CMFRI)