

Indiscriminate exploitation of juvenile black pomfret by ring seines along Kerala coast

Black pomfret, *Parastromateus niger* is an highly esteemed food fish with a very good demand in local and export markets. Unusual heavy landings of juvenile black pomfret was observed at the Kalamukku Landing Centre on 22nd and 23rd August 2016. On 22nd August, a big shoal of about 2 tonnes (t) of juvenile black pomfret was caught by one mechanised inboard (280 HP engine) ring seine unit. Similarly, on 23rd August about 1.25 t of juvenile black pomfret was landed by two mechanised inboard ring seine units with 440 HP engine power. They were reportedly caught at a depth of about 21 m off Kochi. The catch was landed by carrier boats and auctioned for ₹ 1,55,000 and 1,17,000 respectively on the two days. The fishes were having a length range of 14 -



Fish hold of carrier boat with juveniles of black pomfret



Juveniles of black pomfret landed at Kalamukku, Kochi

21 cm each and weighing 55 to 140 g. Similar catches by ring seine units were also observed at Ponnani and Chettuva Landing Centres during the first week of September 2016. Information was received about 26.5 t of juvenile black pomfret in size range 9-13 cm landed at Ponani and around 22 t of pomfrets of size range 7-12 cm at Chettuva Landing Centre during the period. The Minimum Legal Size (MLS) for black pomfret along Kerala coast was recommended as 17 cm total length (Mohamed *et al.*, 2014, *Mar. Fish. Infor. Serv. T & E Ser.* 220:3-7.). In the present

observation more than 50 % of the pomfrets caught were below this MLS with gonads in indeterminate stage. Gut content analysis indicated that most of the stomachs contained semi digested, mud based food mass. This heavy landings of juvenile black pomfret may be due to their mass aggregation in the coastal waters which are productive and rich feeding grounds. Indiscriminate fishing of juveniles can lead to growth overfishing and catch declines. Heavy

exploitation of juveniles of black pomfret by gill nets during 1996 and 1997 in Veraval, Gujarat has been attributed as cause for the heavy decline of black pomfret catches in 1998 and 1999 (Savaria *et al.*, 2002 *Mar. Fish. Infor. Serv. T & E Ser.*, 172:4-5). Regulations to prevent the capture of juveniles should be strictly implemented. Fishers should be educated on the importance of responsible fishing and the harmful impacts of catching undersized fishes.