

## Note

# Cephalopod Fisheries in the Gambia

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In the Gambia, emphasis on cephalopods is mainly centred on the common octopus *O. vulgaris* and the cuttlefish *Sepia officinalis*.

It was not until in the mid-nineties when Fisheries Department, understanding the potential contribution this fishery can make to economy of The Gambia in terms of foreign exchange earnings, the socio-economic advancement of the fisherfolk and the possible reduction of pressure on the other demersal stock, decided to explore the possibility of developing a semi-industrial fishery targeting *Sepia* and *Octopus*.

Significant landings began in 1994 when some Gambian nationals and Senegalese fishermen collaborated in partnership at artisanal level to fish for cephalopods. Artisanal exploitation of cephalopods since then has not developed beyond this level.

However, industrial companies that purchase licences in the Gambia for other demersal fish species, land some volume of cephalopods (unseparated classes) in foreign ports. Only estimates of these landings are available.

### *Stock size*

The Gambia is constrained with capacity to conduct independent resources surveys and therefore have to rely on data provided by subregionally-funded resources surveys such as those carried-out by R/V Dr. Fridtjof Nansen. The most recent of these was in 1995 when the MSY (Maximum Sustainable Yield) of the countries demersal stocks was estimated at 15-17 thousand metric tons. Of these, cephalopods constituted about 6% (940 tons).

Unfortunately it was experienced that during the period 1995-1999, cephalopod landings exceeded the estimated biomass, indicative of biomass underestimation. Particularly in 1999, a total of over 2,000 metric tons was landed resulting in market difficulties.

It goes without saying therefore that a regular comprehensive study of the stocks would be required as we enter the era of relatively developed cephalopod fisheries. With the forthcoming ADB funded project, some meaningful research work will be initiated on key fish species including octopus.

### *Fishery technique*

Almost all cephalopods landed from Gambian waters were hauled by bottom trawls operated by industrial vessels. Trammel nets and traps catch most of artisanal landings. Studies in the efficiency and other aspects of these artisanal fishing gears would be useful exploitation and management strategy.