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Regional Dialogue on “Management of Highly Migratory Fish Species
in the Bay of Bengal”

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Potentialities of Highly Migratory Fish Stocks in the
Exclusive Economic Zone of Bangladesh¹

ABSTRACT

Bangladesh is rich in marine waters. The Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of the country covers an area of 284,813 sq. km that is greater than its land area. The total continental shelf area covers 24,800 sq. km and spans 140,860 sq. km towards open sea and is available to the country for exploration, exploitation, conservation and management of marine resources. Marine fishing of Bangladesh is divided into industrial and artisanal sectors. The artisanal fishing contributes about 83 percent to the marine capture fisheries production targeting Hilsa, Bombay duck, Ribbonfish, Croakers, Catfish, Sardines, Scads, Threadfin breams, etc. as the major groups. The industrial fishing contributes only 17 percent to the total marine production with demersal and pelagic finfish and shrimps constituting the catch.

Tuna and tuna-like highly migratory fish species have been highly placed in the priority list of Bangladesh for a couple of years, especially after demarcation of the sea boundary with the neighboring countries that has led to the access to a larger EEZ. However, tuna and tuna-like fishes are not adequately assessed and their potential less studied. Presently, tunas are by catch of industrial trawlers and artisanal gill netters. In quantity, tuna and tuna-like fishes comprised about 2 percent of the industrial catch in the year 2015-16. Surveys during 1979-80 (R.V. Dr. Fridtjof Nansen) indicated the presence of some species of tunas and tuna-like fishes in the EEZ of Bangladesh. A survey carried out under the aegis of BIMSTEC in 2007 showed the feasibility of catching tuna near the EEZ of Bangladesh, particularly skipjack with drift gillnets. Therefore, exploratory trials with longlines and drift gillnets in the EEZ of Bangladesh and also in the extended continental shelf may be conducted. For proper management of tuna fisheries, data on size, weight, harvesting times, abundance location and other biological characteristics need to be collected.

¹ Md. Enamul Hoq^{1*}, Kamrul Hasan² and K F M Jesmeen Akhter³

¹Bangladesh Fisheries Research Institute, Mymensingh 2201, Bangladesh; ²Department of Fisheries, Islampur, Jamalpur, Bangladesh; ³Ministry of Fisheries & Livestock, Dhaka 1000, Bangladesh;

*Email: hoq_me@yahoo.com

In Bangladesh the marine fishing sector is governed by the Marine Fisheries Ordinance, 1983 and Marine Fisheries Rules, 1983. The trawlers are allowed to catch fish/shrimp in areas not shallower than 40-meter depth. Mechanized fishing boats are allowed to fish within 40-meter depth. As the demersal fishes are under pressure, the focus of fishing on pelagic resources is increasingly being observed after conversion of demersal fish trawlers into mid-water trawlers. A new and more practical act 'Marine Fisheries Act, 2017' is approved by the Cabinet of Bangladesh and will get final approval shortly. Moreover, the Marine Fisheries Policy is in the process of approval where MSY-based reference points will be provided. A primary concern for the region's marine fisheries is that many shared resources are being fished by two or more countries with little or no knowledge on the ability of the stocks to support such fisheries. There is thus a strong argument for the establishment of regional management arrangement for a number of fisheries or stocks, including the tunas.
