

INDIA'S SEAFOOD EXPORTS

- A CRITICAL REVIEW

T. K. Govindan, A. R. S.,
Central Institute of Fisheries Technology,
Matsyapuri P. O., Cochin - 682029, India.



A Samachar report appearing in a News Paper dated January 28, 1977 under the heading "All Time Record in Seafood Exports" states that export of marine products from India during 1976 reached an all-time high, registering a growth of 16% in terms of quantity and over 71% in terms of value over those of 1975. In terms of actual figures they represent 62,151 tonnes of products worth Rs. 179.9 crores against 53,412 tonnes worth Rs. 104.91 crores in 1975. A closer look reveals that shrimp frozen, canned and dried, constituted 89.56% and frozen products (shrimp, frogles, lobster tails, fish and cuttle fish) accounted for 97.07% of the export. This particular point deserves special attention because of the over-dependence on one particular commodity and one particular processing method. Looking commodity-wise, though frozen shrimp was the major item of export (89.34% of export value, with only 0.22% being the share of canned and dried shrimp put together), it is heart-

ening to note that a certain amount of diversification has taken place in the year under review with frozen frogles, lobster tails, fish and cuttle fish contributing to 7.73% of the exports.

Though freezing of frogles for export is almost as old as the freezing industry, the record figure of 3170 tonnes worth Rs. 7.8 crores was reached only in the year 1976. The previous record was in 1973 with 2698 tonnes of frogles worth Rs. 4.5 crores. This sector faced a crisis in the subsequent year following the alleged detection of "Salmonella" in some of the consignment sent to U. S. A. by the Food and Drug Administration. But, thanks to the efforts of our ever vigilant research establishments, their intensive work resulted in the evolution of a method for producing salmonella free frozen frogles. Extensive training programmes conducted in this method for the processors of this commodity throughout the country succeeded in not

only regaining the lost reputation but also in creating the record export last year. Lobster tail freezing, a contemporary of the frogleg freezing industry, has also caught up with the times, touching an all time high of 513 tonnes worth Rs. Rs. 3.18 crores in the year under review.

The performance of the frozen fish industry has been exemplary in that from a mere 2 tonnes worth Rs. 12,000 in 1967, it rose to 1583 tonnes worth Rs. 1.64 crores in 1976. It is commendable that frozen cuttle fish industry has been able to export 648 tonnes worth Rs. 1.33 crores last year even though it was only the fourth year of its birth. Much more remains to be achieved in this sphere of our industry as we have got several other varieties of fish and shell fish which can be preserved by freezing and lucrative export markets developed with proper efforts. Technical know-how for freezing preservation of all our important varieties of fishes has been worked out by our research institutions and it is for the private entrepreneurs to make use of same and put the industry on a firm footing. Clam, mussel, octopus and oyster meats available in sizeable quantities and which lend themselves well for freezing have a good demand in the developed western markets. All our elasmobranch and teleost fishes, barring the highly fatty ones like oil sardines which get rapidly rancid even under frozen storage, can be frozen for the less sophisticated markets as well as for internal consumption, particularly in the interior centres like the hilly and tribal regions where marine fishes are not available. Though comparatively very little research has been carried

out on freezing of our fresh water fishes, many of them being of the lean variety, can reasonably be expected to stand freezing and frozen storage helping even distribution of these fishes season-wise and region-wise. Such a programme will ensure better and more economic utilization of that part of the already installed freezing capacity, now remaining idle due to want of sufficient marketable turn-over.

The year under review has witnessed the lowest ever export of canned shrimp of a mere 102 tonnes worth Rs. 39 lakhs. Since its inception in 1959, the highest record was 2199 tonnes worth Rs. 5.24 crores in 1973. The reasons for this setback are many, the most important being the lack of demand for the commodity in the world markets. The greater demand for frozen shrimp, with the consequent increase in purchase price of the raw material as well as the high cost of the tin container in our country have mainly contributed to the decline in this industry. But there is no need to feel discouraged at this. Our installed canning capacity with necessary modifications wherever called for, can very well be utilised for canning a host of other fish and shell fish varieties. Clam, oyster, mussel and squid meat can be canned with the existing equipments without any modification at all. Oil sardine which constitutes about one-third of our total marine fish landings lends itself excellently for canning in its own juice, brine, oil and a variety of sauces. Canning can be performed either with the existing facilities in round cans or by just changing the seamer, in quarter dingley cans which appear to be more

popular in the international market. Reduction, oil extraction and curing which are resorted to in glut seasons are all undesirable as the former two are not as economic as canning and the third method does not impart a satisfactory shelf life to the product, rancidity developing very rapidly and fungus and mould growth becoming profuse when once the salted fish comes in contact with air. Our mackerel, tuna, pomfret and seer yield excellent products on canning. They can earn foreign exchange and can also be distributed internally both for defence and civilian consumption. One important aspect to be considered in this context is the question of effecting reduction in processing cost by substituting cheaper containers like Aluminium for the costlier, imported tin container. Our brackish and fresh water fishes like mullet, chanos, etroplus, catla, rohu etc. etc. are also known to be amenable to canning.

Another note-worthy feature is that dried shrimp which used to be our most important export commodity and occupied the pride of place among our marine products exports even from pre-historic times has met with an all time slump to a mere 36 tonnes worth Rs. 3.85 lakhs during the year under review.

Dried fish is another of our traditional export commodities with a flourishing market in our neighbouring countries during the pre-independence period. This also met with the same fate as the dry prawn pulp in the post-war era. And we were not in a position to develop new and more sophisticated markets for this commodity either. Drying is one of the oldest methods

of preservation of fish in the world and is bound to remain the most important and popular one for a long time to come. It is the cheapest of all methods, and hence within the reach of the vast majority of the mal-nourished population living below the poverty line. Taking into consideration the magnitude of our fish landings at present and the increase which we expect to achieve in the near future with all the long and short term development programmes on hand, the scope for developing the dried fish industry on modern, sophisticated and hygienic lines, is vast. Besides catering to the needy, quality-conscious markets outside, the product can also solve the internal problem of protein mal-nutrition to a large extent. What is required is clean processing halls, hygienic handling and drying under protected conditions. Different types of dryers making use of solar as well as other conventional sources of energy for accelerated and hygienic drying of salted fish have been designed and fabricated by our research institutions and it is heartening to note that a couple of them are already in operation in the country. Methods are also available for the application of chemical preservative treatments to the product for imparting fairly long shelf life, enabling its wider distribution over longer periods. Let us hope that the process will pick up momentum and transform our traditional cottage industry of salting and drying fish into a well organised, modern, sophisticated and hygienic industry. Even though the peak of our exports in this commodity in recent years has been in 1970 (7269 tonnes worth Rs. 1.84 crores), the trend has been a fluctuating one and last

year we earned Rs. 1.75 crores from its export, though the quantity involved was only 4668 tonnes.

The year under review witnessed the highest ever exports of shark fins and fish maws (268 tonnes worth Rs. 1.53 crores). There is scope for further improvement for this by adopting the technology recently developed for separating the fin rays from fins resulting in higher returns.

In conclusion it may be said that even though the performance of the Indian sea-

food industry in the year 1976 has been highly satisfactory, three points viz; 1) over-dependence on a single commodity (shrimp), 2) over-dependence on a single processing method (freezing) and 3) over-dependence on particular markets stand out as needing active thinking on the part of all concerned. A solution to correct this position is nothing short of diversification in products and markets. Then and then only can the industry be made fully beneficial to the nation. ●

With Best Compliments from

HALY FISHERIES

OFFICE:

Chatrapaty Sivaji Market,
Fish Section, Room No. 3 & 4,
Palton Road, BOMBAY - 400 001
(India)

Phones: Office 267991, 268681
Residence 330029
Cable: "HALYFISH"

FACTORY:

DABHOL

Dist. Ratnagiri - Maharashtra State

LEADING EXPORTERS OF MARINE SEA FOODS
(Shrimps & Lobster tails)

The new modern fish processing factory with ice plant,
connected to Seashore of West Coast of India