



# COUNTRY REPORT - MAURITIUS

Munesh Munbodh

*Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources  
Mauritius*

---

## INTRODUCTION

Over 3,500 fishermen exploit artisanal fisheries around Mauritius and its outer islands. A handline fishery from 13 motherships exploits the banks of the Mascarenes Ridge and the Chagos Archipelago. A tuna purse-seine fishery has developed since 1979 under a joint-venture enterprise. Aquaculture is also developing with recent technology transfer.

Fish is important nutritionally, representing 40% of animal protein intake. An adequate supply of fish for the population is a priority for the government. Despite annual imports of 6,000-8,000 t, the balance of trade in fishery products is positive, largely due to the export of canned tuna.

## TUNA FISHERIES

### The longline fishery

Mauritian involvement in the longline fishery has been rather erratic. A longliner was operated briefly in 1970-71 by a domestic company, and interest in this fishery revived in 1986 in the wake of the general incentives given by the government for investing in the industrial sector. Two small vessels started fishing in 1986, but their catches were rather low and they subsequently stopped fishing. Another vessel of 298 GRT which started fishing in 1986, mainly in the eastern Indian Ocean, has also stopped fishing. In 1995 no industrial longliners are being operated by Mauritius.

### The purse-seine fishery

Purse seining is carried out by three vessels (*Lady Sushil I*, *Lady Sushil II*, and *Cirn *) with a total net tonnage of about 2,000 t.

*Lady Sushil I*, launched in 1979, made the first attempts to catch tuna with a purse seine in the southwest Indian Ocean. These attempts were followed by exploratory fishing by French vessels, which eventually led to a large-scale surface fishery for tuna in the region. *Lady Sushil II* was launched in 1987, while the "*Cirn *" started operations in 1991. Since 1994 the latter has been chartered to a foreign company and has been landing its catches in Singapore and Thailand. The catches of the purse-seine fishery from 1992 to 1994 are given in Table 1.

## TUNA CANNING

Tuna-canning operations started in Mauritius in 1972, with raw material imported from Madagascar. However, this source of supply stopped in 1975 and tuna began to be imported from the Maldives. The cannery now has a processing capacity of 20,000 t.

In 1990 another canning plant, with a processing capacity of 6,000 t, came into operation. However, the company did not own fishing vessels and had considerable difficulties in obtaining raw material for the plant, and stopped production in 1993.

The value of canned tuna exported in 1994 was Rs. 447 million.

## TUNA TRANSHIPMENT

Port Louis has been used as a base for transshipment of tuna caught by Japanese, Korean and Taiwanese longliners since 1965. Landings peaked at over 30,000 t in 1967 and subsequently declined. This was due initially to reduced yields from the fishery and movement of the fishing fleet to other transshipment ports.

The volumes of tuna transshipped in the last few years have increased, and reached 14,946 t in 1994 (Table 2). It is expected that the amount of tuna transshipped might be kept around this level, since longliners are attracted to Port Louis, especially by the provision of new cold room facilities in the freeport area.

## THE REGIONAL TUNA PROJECT

Mauritius is participating in a Regional Tuna Fishing Project, partially funded by the European Economic Community through the Indian Ocean Commission. Other countries party to this project are Comores, the Malagasy Republic, France (La R union), and the Seychelles. The objectives of the project are to assist member countries in developing their tuna fisheries and in the collection and processing of biological, environmental and statistical data for understanding tuna resources better and for management purposes.

**Table 1.** *Tonnage (t) of tuna caught by longliners transhipped in Port Louis.*

<i>Year</i>	<i>Landings</i>	<i>Landings + Direct Transshipments</i>
1992	4,536	7,230
1993	6,157	11,807
1994	7,623	14,946

**Table 2.** *Catches by purse seiners.*

<i>Year</i>	<i>Production (t)</i>
1992	9,006
1993	10,279
1994	7,689

A two-year FAD efficiency study was initiated in 1993, with the following objectives:

- 1. assess the productivity of FADs;
- 2. determine species composition of catches and
- 3. seasonality of fishing around FADs.

Data are being analysed and a report will be produced soon.

### **FISHING AGREEMENTS AND LICENSING OF FISHING VESSELS**

In 1990 the European Economic Community entered into an agreement with Mauritius to enable EEC vessels to fish in Mauritian waters. In 1995, 17 licences for purse seining have been issued under this agreement, and as of this year licenses have also been issued to Japanese and Taiwanese longliners for fishing in Mauritian waters.

In 1991 Mauritius also entered into an agreement with the Seychelles to enable Mauritian vessels to fish in Seychelles waters.

### **MEASURES WHICH WILL EXPAND BENEFITS FROM TUNA RESOURCES**

Industrial tuna fishing is one of the areas in which a significant expansion of the Mauritian fishing industry is possible. The following measures could contribute to this:

- a) provision of the incentives necessary to increase tuna fishing and tuna processing capacity;
- b) support to induce development of a semi-industrial longline fishery and advanced artisanal tuna fishing;
- c) training of local fishermen in longline fishing for semi-industrial fishing by small longline vessels, and
- d) access agreements with neighbouring states to enable Mauritian vessels to operate in their waters.

