

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE REUNION NATIONAL LONGLINE FISHERY AND RESULTS OF THE EXPERIMENTAL FISHERY OF THE SEYCHELLES TARGETING SWORDFISH (*XIPHIAS GLADIUS*).

Comparison of characteristics of the two fisheries: catch, effort, catch rates, bycatch, and size structure of the catch.

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ABSTRACT

*The development since 1991 of the surface longline fishery targeting swordfish (*Xiphias gladius*) has opened an interesting avenue for a fishing fleet of different types and sizes (monohulls and catamarans between 12 and 33 meters). These longliners, constructed for this fishery, operate in the French EEZ in the Indian Ocean (a surface area of 2.7 million km²) around La Réunion. The catch of swordfish, estimated at a few tons in 1992, had surpassed 530 tons in 1994. These results prompted the Seychelles Fishing Authority (SFA) to start experimental longlining trips with the help of La Réunion.*

It seems contrary, that the waters exploited by France, the waters of the Seychelles, besides the targeted species, swordfish, are also rich in bigeye and yellowfin, which represent 50, 17 and 22% of the catch (in weight) respectively.

Analyses of the first results in relation to the variations in average size of swordfish caught as a function of the latitude seem to confirm the observations made in the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. This seems to indicate a relationship in the evolution of average size and latitude.

It is essential already to (1) adopt a cautious approach towards the stock of a fishery which targets juveniles, (2) develop a multispecies fishery targeting swordfish, yellowfin and bigeye at the same time, (3) search for swordfish of a size compatible with market demands and identify and explore areas rich in large swordfish.

This will encourage the pursuit of a common scientific program, on a larger scale, among the different countries of the zone, to study the biology of this species, which is still unknown in this ocean. Finally the economic viability of this stock in the Indian Ocean goes through a complete process (catch, processing of the product and access to markets in the northern hemisphere)

