

# COUNTRY REPORT OF SMALL TUNAS AND SEERFISH, SAUDI ARABIA

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## Introduction

The kingdom of Saudi Arabia is bounded by two semi-enclosed seas, the Red Sea in the West and the Arabian Gulf in the East. The Red Sea is a long and narrow body of water connected with the Mediterranean Sea through the Suez Canal in the north and with the Gulf of Aden and Indian Ocean through the narrow Straits of Bab-el-Mendab in the south. The Arabian Gulf is enclosed by Kuwait, Iraq and Iran in the north and connected with the Gulf of Oman and the Indian Ocean through the narrow passage of the Hormuz Strait.

The major commercially-exploited species in the two seas are native species such as shrimps, emperors, scads, jacks, groupers, sea breams, and snappers, together with migratory species such as Spanish mackerel, Indian mackerel, longtail tuna and kawakawa.

### Commercially important species of small tunas and seerfish

Small tunas	Kawakawa ( <i>Euthynnus affinis</i> )
	Longtail tuna ( <i>Thunnus tonggol</i> )
	Dogtooth tuna ( <i>Gymnosarda unicolor</i> )
Seerfish	Narrow-barred Spanish mackerel ( <i>Scomberomorus commerson</i> )

Of the above four species, three are found in both the Red Sea and the Arabian Gulf; the dogtooth tuna is caught only in the Red Sea. The Indo-Pacific king mackerel (*Scomberomorus guttatus*) is also available but rare in the two seas.

National catch data are classified only into Tunas nei (TUN) and Seerfishes nei (KGX), as shown in Table 1, and catch data by species of small tunas are available only for the Red Sea (Table 2).

The total seerfish catch includes 71 tonnes caught in international waters.

## Types of gear used

The major types of gear used in the two seas for capturing small tunas and seerfish are handlines and gillnets. Other types of gear, such as troll lines, traps and longlines, are also used, but they do not solely target small tunas and seerfish but many other species as well. However, some large-mesh gillnetters and troll liners target seerfish and tunas.

Most of the boats used are traditional fishing boats operating in coastal waters. A few industrial fishing boats also capture small tunas and seerfishes as bycatch.

## Trends in catch of small tunas and seerfish

In the Red Sea, landings of tunas and seerfish changed significantly after 1995. However, these were not real changes but are due to the fact that the data collection system has been improved since 1995.

In the Arabian Gulf, the data collection system has also been improved since 1995, so the figures after 1995 are more reliable than those for earlier years.

## Monthly change in landings

There were fluctuations in monthly catches of small tunas and seerfishes in the two seas, as shown in the above figures. The patterns of the fluctuations were similar in both 1995 and 1996, with some exceptions.

In the Red Sea, monthly landings of small tunas and seerfish fluctuated less than in the Arabian Gulf except for the peak months, March and April 1995 and December 1996 for small tunas and May 1996 for seerfish.

In the Arabian Gulf, the largest catches of small tunas were recorded in October, both in 1995 and 1996. The fishing season for seerfish peaked during March, April and May in both years.

## Catch rates of small tunas and seerfish

Figure 5 shows, as an example, the average catch rate, in kg per fishing day, of small tunas and seerfish by the large-mesh gillnet fishery operated by large traditional fishing boats in the Arabian Gulf in 1996. This type of gear targets mainly seerfish and tunas. It is operated throughout the year, but many fishing boats change to trawl fishing for shrimp in August and September, as the season for that fishery starts in August.

In 1996, the highest catch rate was recorded in September for seerfish and in October for small tunas by a small number of fishing boats in these months.

## Markets

Seerfish is a favorite fish for the people in the Kingdom and fetches a relatively high price, retailing at around 25 Saudi rials per kilogram (US\$1 = 3.75 rials) in Riyadh. Many seerfish are imported from neighbouring countries.

Tunas are not as popular as seerfish in the Kingdom, fetching the relatively low retail price of around 9 rials per kilogram in Riyadh.

**Table 1. Catches of small tunas and seerfish in 1996, in tonnes and as percentage of total catches.**

Species	Red Sea	Arabian Gulf	Total
Tunas (TUN)	392 (1.7 %)	699 (3.2 %)	1,091 (2.3 %)
Seerfish (KGX)	2,640 (11.7 %)	2,566 (11.6 %)	5,277 (11.0 %)
Total	3,032 (13.4 %)	3,265 (14.8 %)	6,368 (13.3 %)

<sup>1</sup> Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Ministry of Agriculture and Water, Department of Marine Fisheries

**Table 2. Catches of small tunas (tonnes) in the Red Sea, by species, 1996**

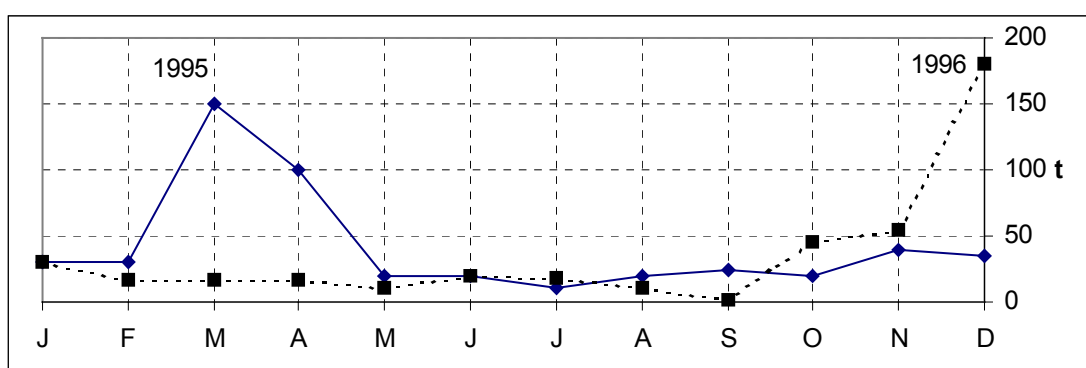
Species	Total	North	Central	South
Longtail tuna (LOG)	115	11	71	33
Kawakawa (KAW)	162	18	70	74
Dogtooth tuna (DOG)	59	5	54	-
Tunas nei (TUN)	56	-	40	16
Total	392	34	235	123

**Table 3. Catches (tonnes) of traditional fisheries by type of gear, 1996**

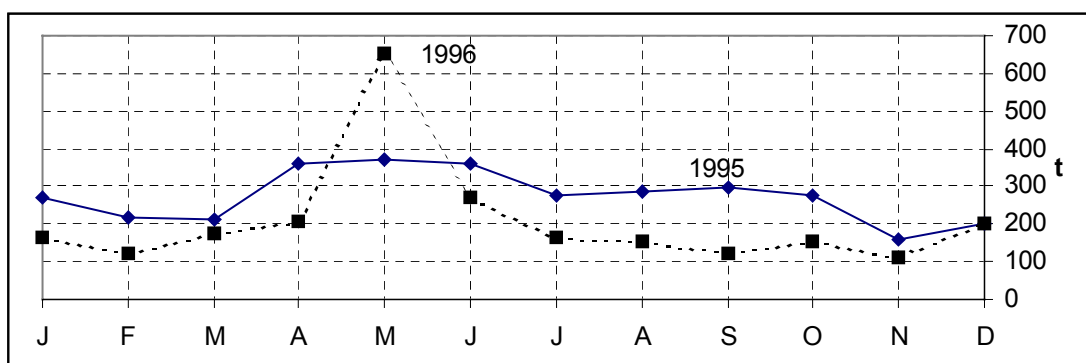
Area/Type of gear	Small tunas	Seerfishes	Total
Northern Red Sea			
Handlines	22	107	129
Gillnets	1	2	3
Traps	5		5
Troll lines	5	12	17
Central Red Sea			
Handlines	155	187	342
Gillnets	75	168	243
Others	5		5
Southern Red Sea			
Handlines/Gillnets	107	2,011	2,118
Arabian Gulf			
Gillnets	695	1,975	2,670
Handlines	3	195	198
Troll lines	1	382	383
Total	1,091	5,277	6,368

**Table 4. Landings (tonnes) of small tunas and seerfish, 1987-1996.**

	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
Red Sea										
Tunas	215	226	263	170	170	179	188	199	431	392
Seerfish	7949	8314	8347	8142	8142	8547	8977	8999	3283	2640
Arabian Gulf										
Tunas	4	62	56	102	347	165	526	719	756	699
Seerfish	1120	1048	895	520	626	1323	1398	1850	2977	2566



**Figure 1. Monthly landings (tonnes) of tunas in the Red Sea, 1995-1996**



**Figure 2. Monthly landings (tonnes) of seerfish in the Red Sea, 1995-1996**

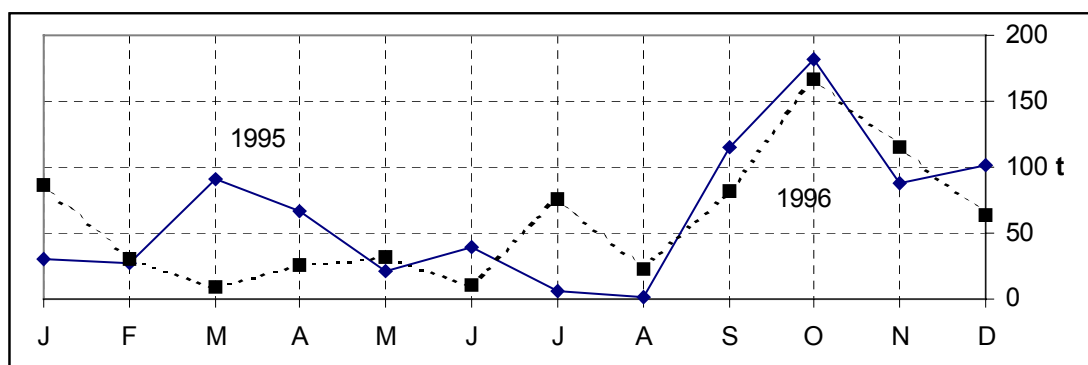


Figure 3. Monthly landings (tonnes) of tunas in the Arabian Gulf, 1995-1996

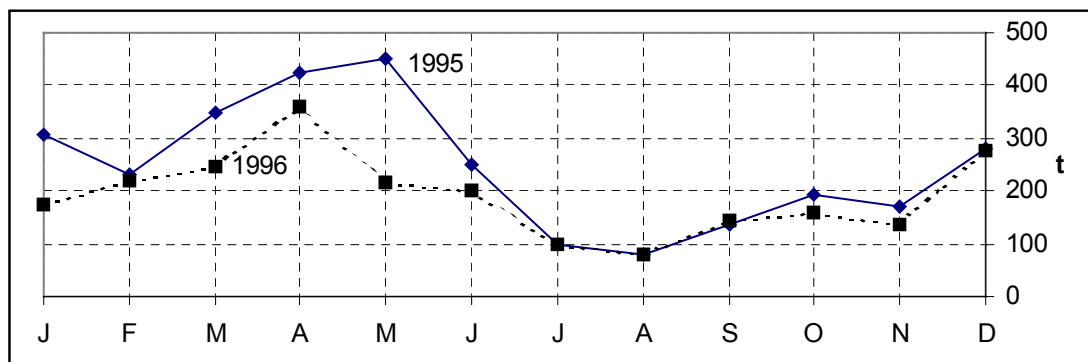


Figure 4. Monthly landings (tonnes) of seerfish in the Arabian Gulf, 1995-1996

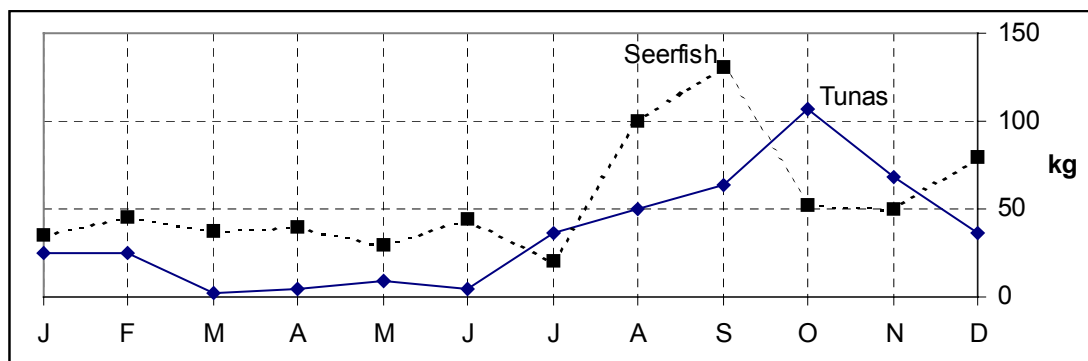


Figure 5. Average catch rate (kg/fishing day) of small tunas and seerfish by the large-mesh gillnet fishery operated by large traditional fishing boats in the Arabian Gulf, 1996