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Skipjack Fishery in the Maldives – an Update

M. Shiham Adam and Riyaz Jauharee
Marine Research Centre (MRC)
Ministry of Fisheries and Agriculture
Malé, Republic of Maldives

The Maldives skipjack tuna fishery is one of the most important in the Indian Ocean. Skipjack landings in the Maldives amounts to roughly 20% of the reported total Indian Ocean skipjack catch. Catches in the Maldives reached a peak in 2006 amounting to 138,000t, but have been declining since then. Reported catches were only 59,000t in 2010, over 55% lower than the catches in 2006. Nominal catch rates dropped from around 800 kg/trip in 2006 to less than 400 kg/trip in 2010. The rapid decline in skipjack catches are of concern to the Maldives.

Possible reasons for this decline include, among other things, unfavorable environmental condition affecting vulnerability to surface pole-and-line gear. It may also be due to socio-economic factors related high cost of fishing during periods of poor catch, but also due to overall reduction in abundance of stock due to increased fishing pressure in the Western Indian Ocean where the main industrial purse seine fleet operates.

Time series of size samples show the considerable changes in bimodal size distribution of the skipjack but also a noticeable reduction in the proportion of the large skipjack otherwise well represented in the Maldivian skipjack catches.

The presentation provides a general review of the status of the fishery, including structural changes in the fleet and its operational aspects occurred in the recent years. Information on the developments taking place to improve the data collection and compilation are also presented.