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Species composition of Groupers along Vizhinjam Coast, Kerala, India

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Groupers are considered as most valuable commercial fish resources of the family Serranidae. Grouper species are highly priced and are heavily exploited mainly for commercial and recreational purposes. The average annual landing of Rock cods in India during 2013 - 2019 was 42060.43t and that of Vizhinjam was 68.59t. Vizhinjam (80°22'45"N Latitude and 76°05'29"E Longitude) is one of the major fishing village and Landing centre in Kerala. In Vizhinjam, during 2019, 117.485 tonnes of groupers were landed of which 70.6% and 29.4% were contributed by *Epinephelus* and *Cephalopholis* species respectively. Both the Pre-monsoon and Post-monsoon periods of 2019 exhibited the highest landings of grouper compared to the Monsoon period. *Epinephelus* species landed included *E. bleekeri*, *E. diacanthus*, *E. cholorostigma*, *E. undulosus*, *E. areolatus*, *E. ongus*, *E. radiates*, *E. merra*, *E. longispinis* and *E. latifasciatus* and *Cephalopholis* species was contributed by *C. sonnerati* and *C. argus*. Annual landing of *Cephalopholis sonnerati* was high i.e., 36254 tonnes followed by *Epinephelus bleekeri* (23763 tonnes) and *Epinephelus diacanthus* (19497 tonnes).

Here these fish species are mainly being commercially exploited using different gears like Hook & line, outboard gill net, outboard boat seine, and other non-motorized gears within 10-150m of depth range. Although Trawlers are popular to be involved in fishing of demersal fish resources, in Vizhinjam the maximum catch of groupers was contributed by Hook and line with an average effort in Unit operations and average effort in actual fishing hours as 12107.42 and 53091.25 respectively. The smaller fishes are usually sold in local markets and the larger ones (mostly above 35cm) are exported. These are sold at an average rate of Rs.300/kg and are preferred widely in domestic consumption because of the delicious taste and good quality of the meat. Number 9 and 13 Hooks are usually used in the capture. Shimmering bait locally known as "Minusam" is the most commonly used artificial bait and *Odonous niger* is the most commonly used fresh bait in the capture of groupers.

Biography:

Ponni J Mohan is a third year PhD student, registered at Kerala University of Fisheries and Ocean Studies (KUFOS), Kochi, Kerala and doing her doctoral work at Vizhinjam Regional Centre of CMFRI, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, India. She holds a Master's Degree in Zoology from University of Kerala.