

FISHERY COUNTRY PROFILE

Food and Agriculture
Organization of the United
Nations

FID/CP/QAR



October 2003

PROFIL DE LA PÊCHE PAR PAYS

Organisation des Nations Unies
pour l'alimentation et
l'agriculture

RESUMEN INFORMATIVO SOBRE LA PESCA POR PAISES

Organización de las Naciones
Unidas para la Agricultura y la
Alimentación

STATE OF QATAR

STRUCTURE AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE FISHING INDUSTRY

Marine fisheries

The fisheries of Qatar, like other Arabian Gulf countries, are primarily artisanal in nature. Although Qatar's shrimp fishery reached production levels of over 900 t per year in the 1970s and involved a small number of industrial trawlers as well as artisanal vessels, the Government closed the fishery in 1993 in response to declining landings and there has been no production since that time.

As a result of this closure, finfish landings from the artisanal fleet now comprise over 98% of the total landings by Qatar's fishing fleet. Of this, landings of emperor (*Lethrinus* spp) and groupers (*Epinephelus* spp) by the fish trap fishery are the largest components, accounting for 1820 t each in 2001 or 42% together of total landings. Mackerel (*Scomberomorus commerson*) and grunt are other major components of the catch, accounting for 11.0% and 10.1% of total production respectively.

The number of fishermen has risen substantially in Qatar since 1995, with fishermen numbers increasing from 3101 in 1995 to 4721 in 2001. However, the number of fishing vessels has remained static, ranging from 493 in 1995 to 515 in the period 1998-2001. Of these vessels, 49% are 50 ft (16.4 m) in length or greater. This has resulted in the number of fishermen/vessel increasing, a result of the trend towards larger artisanal vessels and the increasing employment of foreign workers on vessels.

Fishing methods used in Qatar include gillnet, large wire traps (local name *gargoor*), small *gargoor*, and hook-and-line. Many boats use a combination of fishing gear. The most important sector of the fishery is the fish trap (*gargoor*) fishery that targets groupers, emperors and grunts.

There is also an active, but unquantified, recreational fisheries sector that targets the same species as the professional fishery, in particular the groupers, grunts, emperors and mackerel.

Exports, which are mainly re-exports, rose dramatically in 2001 from virtually nothing to 2,100 t of fresh and frozen fish. Imports also have risen strongly in recent years, almost doubling in the period from 1996 to 2001 from 1572 t to 3820 t.

Landings have increased from an average of around 5 000 t during the period 1994-99 to 8 863 t in 2001. The reason for the increase has been increases in catches of groupers and emperors from the trap fishery (which at 3640 t, comprised 42% of landings) and Spanish mackerel (1020 t in 2001, comprising 12% of landings).

Aquaculture

Aquaculture is not a traditional activity in Qatar and there is no significant aquaculture production. The University of Qatar has experimental facilities and a farm (established in 1988) that focuses on rabbit fish (*Siganus caniculatus*) and grouper (*Epinephelus* spp) culture. However, no major commercial production occurs.

Catch utilization

Fish that is landed is taken by fishermen or middlemen to the fish auction which is held each day between 0400 and 0600 hours at the Doha Central Market. Fish retailers purchase fish at this auction and transport the whole product to their shops for sale to the public. For the local market, fish are sold primarily whole, fresh chilled. However, when there is a surplus, the product can be frozen or dried for later sale.

The major fish market in Qatar is in Doha although smaller markets exist at al-Shamal, al-Wakra and al-Khour. In 2001, the Doha market accounted for around 43% of landings and al-Khour for 34%.

Most production is consumed locally although some fish is exported to neighboring countries, particularly Saudi Arabia.

State of the industry

Total landings and the number of fishermen have increased steadily over the last 20 years, with landings doubling since 1995 from 4271 t to 8863 t in 2001. The increase in landings has generally been for all species, and most likely reflects an increase in fishing effort for most fisheries sectors.

Driftnets are banned, but continue to be used routinely by fishermen. A Fisheries Enforcement Committee was established in 1997 to address the issue of illegal fishing, but this still remains a significant problem.

Increasing fishing effort and environmental issues such as land reclamation and dredging are emerging as significant issues in Qatar's fisheries.

Economic role of the fishery industry

The commercial fisheries sector is small and contributes less than 0.1% to GDP. However, the sector is important from a socio-economic viewpoint in that it provides the main economic activity and employment for numerous coastal villages.

In addition, the recreational fishing sector in Qatar is developing. There are about 1 000 pleasure craft at the various boat marinas in Qatar, about 80 percent of which are used for recreational fishing.

DEVELOPMENT PROSPECTS

Although landings have increased in recent years, Qatar's fishery is at maturity. The

combination of increased fishing effort, limited coastline and coastal environmental issues makes for very limited development prospects for the wild fishery.

Aquaculture may have some potential, but a limitation on suitable marine, coastal or land-based sites may inhibit the significant development of this industry.

Fisheries management

Fisheries regulations that control inputs are in-place, but compliance has been limited. Illegal fishing methods are commonly being used. Output controls are not used in any Qatari fisheries.

Because of the regional distribution of many of the key species taken by the commercial fishery in Qatar, independent management of the stocks of fish in Qatari waters is difficult. Regional co-operation in management is achieved through the Regional Commission for Fisheries, RECOFI.

There is a growing and presently uncontrolled recreational fishing sector that is in direct competition with commercial fishermen.

Demand

Unlike neighboring countries, imports of fisheries products to Qatar have only risen slowly from 1227 t in 1995 to 1679 t in 2001. This is primarily a result of local increasing demand being met by increasing local production.

RESEARCH

The University of Qatar is the primary institution for fisheries and aquaculture research in Qatar with both an interest in wild capture fisheries biology and assessment and aquaculture. The University also operates an aquaculture research farm, which was established in 1988. The Ministry of Agriculture is responsible for collection of landing and market data for the Fisheries Database.

AID

There is no direct foreign assistance for Qatar's fisheries.

In the past, there have been various aid programs to assist local fishermen. These have included training, equipment subsidies, equipment repair and bank loans. In the late 1990s, the Government initiated a new loan program for fishermen.

INTERNET LINKS

Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Agriculture

<http://www.mmaa.gov.qa> (currently only in Arabic)