

Recent trends in beche-de-mer exports from New Caledonia

by Régis Etaix-Bonnin¹

The most representative data on beche-de-mer fishery developments in New Caledonia continue to be the export tonnage and value figures provided by the Customs Service.

This information has its limits, however, because it relates to an exported commodity, whereas customs records almost always concern imports. The possible resulting inaccuracies are much more likely to affect values than tonnages exported. In addition, customs commodity classifications do not distinguish between exported sea cucumbers by species, although different species have very different commercial values. The only useable data, therefore, are the aggregate export figures for the last five years, which are shown in Table 1.

It emerges from these data that, whereas apparent mean values have remained stable in the last two years, exported tonnages dropped sharply in 1998 (-31% compared to 1997 and -51% compared to 1994).

Although, as stated above, it is hazardous to rely only on export data, this slump could indicate excessive pressure on the resource.

This is one of the reasons why the Northern Province authorities in New Caledonia have commissioned a resource study, which could begin in the weeks to come. There are plans to conduct a similar study on trochus.

Table 1. Beche-de-mer exports from New Caledonia

	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
Quantity (t)	79.8	48.0	49.2	56.5	39.1
Value (US\$)*	1 131 910	1 004 340	784 430	1 181 920	791 500
Ave. price (US\$/kg)	14.1	20.9	15.9	20.9	20.2

* For US\$ 1.00 = 110 CFP

Some news on the Galapagos situation.

Sea cucumber fishery postponed

Puerto Baquerizo Moreno (Ivan Naula).

English translation from *El Universo*, 15 March 1999

The start of the fishery for sea cucumbers, scheduled for today, was postponed until 25 March by request of the presidents of the fishery cooperatives on the three islands, because they have not been able to purchase the fishing gear and other materials due to the bank holiday.

In a document, the directors of the cooperatives requested the postponement of the start of the sea cucumber fishery, because only today, with the re-opening of the banks, will they be able to make the

necessary transactions and withdrawals to buy the fishing gear.

Galapagos: The DAC could be involved: Sea cucumbers, a cargo was confiscated

English translation from *El Comercio*, 3 April 1999

The illegal fishing for sea cucumbers does not stop. On 31 March, 17 500 sea cucumbers were confiscated in the airport on Isabela Island (Galapagos). This was denounced by Yolanda Kakabadse, Minister of the Environment.

The incident could have greater implications, because it seems that personnel of the National

Department of Aviation (*Direccion Nacional de Aviacion Civil* or DAC) took part in the illegal action. Inspectors of the Galapagos National Park observed that boxes and suitcases were being unloaded from a car belonging to the DAC and taken to a plane of the Air Force that was going to leave for Guayaquil.

Investigations began and it was shown that the cargo did not have the pre-checking seal, nor did it have an addressee indicated. The driver of the vehicle was Sargeant Braulio Bravo, of the DAC.

The Minister stated that, before the 1st of April, sea cucumber fishing was prohibited and that the confiscated sea cucumbers were already processed. She acknowledged that the Ministry authorized the opening of the sea cucumber fishery in Galapagos for two months, beginning the 1st of April. The objective: to evaluate the impact that the exploitation of this species could cause.

Soon new regulations would be announced, along with the names of the three sites in which it will be possible to undertake fishing activities. The Charles Darwin Research Station and the National Institute of Fisheries (*Instituto Nacional de Pesca*)

will be in charge of the analysis of data. In addition, sea cucumber fishermen will be trained with regard to permitted size and quotas.

Fishing for sea cucumbers was officially closed in 1995, but the National Department of Fisheries (*Direccion Nacional de Pesca*) in Guayaquil continued to receive denunciations. The arguments given by the infractors: the activity took place before the moratorium.

The uncontrolled harvesting began in 1991 in the waters around Isabela Island, in the Bolivar Channel by Fernandina Island and in the zone of exclusion within the 40-mile limit.

A report by Traffic International, the program that monitors trade in wildlife, stated that, between 1992 and 1996, 80 metric tons of sea cucumbers, that is, more than four million individuals, were exported.

In addition, the trade structure had problems: a sea cucumber shipment left Galapagos and went to Piura (Peru), then entered Guayaquil to travel to Mexico or the United States and thence to Hong Kong and Taiwan.

Holothurian fishery in Washington (USA)

by Alex Bradbury¹

Monday, 08 February 1999

Landings of sea cucumbers in the Washington State, from 1995 onward, have been:

- 1995: 529 metric tonnes
- 1996: 237 metric tonnes
- 1997: 227 metric tonnes
- 1998: 208 metric tonnes

The reason for the big drop in landings beginning in 1996 is simple: that is the year that treaty Indian tribes began receiving (legally) 50 per cent of the total statewide quota. But the Indian tribes are still not set up for diving, very few boats participate in the Indian fishery, so the 50 per cent of the quota assigned to Indian tribes is not taken, except for a few pounds. It is not legal for non-Indians to take the Indian 50 per cent, even if the Indians are unable to take their share. This may change in the fu-

ture, as the Indians learn the fishery and buy diving equipment. Quotas themselves have remained relatively stable for 1996 and 1997 at 480 metric tonnes annually. But in 1998 we arbitrarily reduced the annual quota to 408 metric tonnes, a 15 per cent reduction simply because we are not doing any stock assessment and therefore do not know what is happening to the stocks.

Catch per unit effort (CPUE) trends in recent years (as kg per diver hour, from logbook data, non-Indian divers only) are as follows:

- 1995: 63 kg/hr
- 1996: 56 kg/hr
- 1997: 65 kg/hr
- 1998: 80 kg/hr

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