



Beche-de-mer collection rafts like this allow intense harvesting of the resource by coastal villagers.
(Photo: Garry Preston)

Centralisation of processing may also have another unwanted effect, namely that of encouraging overfishing. Any large processing plant is going to need a certain amount of product to keep it going, and, for logistical reasons, much of this will be harvested from the plant's immediate vicinity. In the case of species such as the blackfish, that naturally occur in high densities, it may be possible to achieve sustainable harvest levels even close to a processing plant. However, other species that occur in lower densities may be less resilient. This group may include the sandfish, *Holothuria scabra*, which is also the target of centralised processing activities. Last year, concerns were expressed in Fiji that this species, which is also used locally as a foodstuff, was being depleted in some areas. As a result, a ban on exports of *H. scabra* has been imposed by the Fiji Government since January 1989.

The high level of beche-de-mer exploitation in Fiji looks set to continue, at least in the near future. The explosive growth of the industry raises some serious concerns about the long-term sustainability of these

harvesting levels. Biological information on which to base a management system is almost completely lacking, and even if information were available, the difficulties of effectively managing a geographically scattered, multi-species fishery that is of such importance in generating rural incomes, are great. The only realistic means of monitoring and controlling the fishery is via the exporting companies, which are not too numerous and mainly operate from three urban centres. The Fiji Government is presently encouraging the development of an Association of Seafood Exporters, with a strict code of practice that includes providing information to the Fisheries Division, and encouraging the addition of value to the product at the village level. Exporters must be members of the Association to obtain an export licence for beche-de-mer. This system may be expanded to cover other inshore marine resources in the future.

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New Caledonia export statistics

New Caledonia exported a total of 135 tonnes (dry weight) of beche-de-mer during the period January - December 1989. Three local companies between them exported the entire volume. No details on species composition of exports are presently available.

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