Fishing With Lure-Lines

By H. VAN PEL
Fisheries Officer, South Pacific Commission

Fish can be attracted to a given spot by several means. A very efficient one used in Indonesia is a lure-line anchored in the sea, in depths of from five to thirty fathoms.*

As the sketch above shows, the lure itself consists of a float, an anchor line to which pieces of coconut leaves are attached, and an anchor or a stone weight (I have seen long grass used instead of coconut leaves). The float is usually made of one or more bamboo sticks. The anchor line is a rope made of bamboo fibre or some other material, of a length equal to one and a half times the depth of the sea. (A depth of thirty fathoms, for instance, will require a forty-five-fathom line.) Pieces of coconut leaves (one-sixth of a frond) are pinched between the strands of the rope or attached to it every yard. Some of the old coconut leaves will have to be replaced after one or two weeks.

The anchor is made of bamboo and is weighted by stones; an excellent rig for soft bottoms. Where the sea bed is hard, however, rocks replace the bamboo anchor.

This type of lure is anchored in places where the current is slow, not exceeding two miles per hour. Upon anchoring the lure, the fishermen take bearings from shore, hills, mountains, trees or islands, in order to find the spot again.

In most cases, it takes from three to five days for the fish to approach the lure. Then fishing operations can commence, and be repeated daily. This lure mainly attracts herring, mackerel and sardine species, but small tuna and other pelagic fish also come to it sometimes. Where there is a current, the fish normally swim a short distance upstream of the lure.

This rig is not so effective in turbid water. The best fishing conditions are offered by a slight discoloration of the water, which permits fishing during the daytime. The lure is most effective in very clear water, but then net fishing can only take place at sunrise or at sunset.

A deep-sea seine (bag-net, with two wings and an underlip) or a lift-net is used with the lure.

Before fishing operations start, the lure must normally be lifted, although there are exceptions to this rule. After lifting the first ten fathoms, the fishermen undo a connection, and this top part of the line, weighted with a stone, is put in the water again, while the rest of the lure, together with the anchor, is pulled aboard the boat. The fish are now gathered near the first ten fathoms of the lure, the "room" as it is called. The "room" is then handed over to a canoe, handled by one or two men. The canoe thus acts as a float. The fishing boat then goes away from the canoe and sets its net as a surround net around the canoe. This has to be done in such a way that the bag of the seine is upstream of the lure. The reason for this is that frightened fish always tend to escape upstream. The "room" is pulled in gradually as the net is drawn and the fish follow it, coming nearer to the surface of the water. At the last moment, the "room" is pulled entirely aboard the canoe, which paddles away from the net as the last part (the bag) comes in.

Catches can vary widely. Sometimes, when the current and the winds do not agree, the net is empty. On the other hand, catches of one or two tons may be made with one lure. (I have personally made a maximum catch of two and a half tons.)

This type of fishing is suitable for motorboats, open sailboats (which are rowed during the actual fishing operations) and even for outrigger canoes. Some motor fishing boats have up to twenty lures in the sea, and sailboats may have from two to four.

I have described here only the normal application of this fishing technique, but variations can be introduced.

Those who may be interested in this type of fishing but feel that the information given is not clear enough, or seems difficult to carry out under specific local conditions, should not hesitate to write for fuller information or advice.

Literacy Survey in Melanesia

Dr. K. Neij, Literacy Adviser to the Commission, visited New Caledonia, the New Hebrides and the British Solomon Islands from early April to late July, to survey forms and methods of literacy teaching being used and to investigate practical needs in teaching and opportunities for expanding work in these areas of Melanesia.

One particular problem Dr. Neij observed was the need for suitable teaching materials in the re-education of adults who had to a certain extent lost their reading and writing skills, although these had been quite well developed during their attendance at school. He was able to assist in the preparation of aids of this kind, based on recent experience elsewhere, as well as to help in drawing up suitable teaching materials for use in the schools themselves.