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The Marine Fisheries of Liberia 1970-71

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THE MARINE FISHERIES OF LIBERIA, 1970-71

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I. SUMMARY

Mesurado Fishing Company is the only modern fish and shrimp producing company in Liberia. In spite of growing fishery imports, Liberia has now become a major fish exporter due to a newly developed shrimp industry. A total of 37 shrimp vessels now operate out of Mesurado's base at Monrovia. New processing equipment, freezing capacity, dock space, and a drydock have helped increase overall efficiency.

II. LOCAL PRODUCTION

The most recent significant change occurring in the fisheries of Liberia has been the dramatic increase in shrimp production. This, combined with improved plant facilities for fish processing, has transformed Liberia from a predominantly fish importer to an exporter in 1970.

The presence of juvenile, estuarine shrimp was known for many years. In recent times, the introduction of modern trawlers revealed the presence of large, adult shrimp in Liberia's offshore waters. In 1969, the first of three new shrimp vessels designed for shrimping arrived in Monrovia. By 1971, the shrimp fleet had increased to 37 vessels (due to agreements with foreign-flag vessels), and three new vessels are on order from Rockport, Texas, for delivery early in 1972.

Total shrimp production has increased from 6,913 pounds in 1968 to 1,675,673 pounds in 1970. Although 1971 production figures have not yet been tabulated, extrapolation of the number of vessels fishing by the average production per vessel would indicate a total production of approximately four million pounds. The average shrimp production per vessel is between 50 and 70 metric tons per year; highline vessels produce from 70 to 80 tons per year.

Observations by fishermen show two seasonal peak fishing periods. The first starts in March and ends in June; production reaches 1,500 pounds per day during this period. The second peak occurs from September to mid-December, with production averaging 300 to 500 pounds per day. The best concentrations of shrimp are generally found between 15 and 25 fathoms. Loss of gear has been reported as light, except where areas of rock may be silted over. The weather is reported as ideal. Occasional catches of sole, crayfish, and crabs are made.

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Approximately 3,000 tons of bottomfish species are landed by Monrovia-based vessels each year. The Mesurado plant in Monrovia has a maximum processing capacity of 600 tons of fish per month. Purchases of frozen fish from Polish and Japanese flag vessels (under contract) total about 7,000 tons per annum.

III. IMPORTS AND EXPORTS OF FISH PRODUCTS

Official import and export statistics are available only to 1970. For comparative purposes, import and export data from 1968 to 1970 are tabulated in tables 1 - 4.

Table 1.--Liberian fishery imports, by quantity (in lbs.), 1968-70.

COMMODITY	1968	1969	1970
Fresh or frozen fish	32,321	118,782	25,439
Stockfish (dried cod)	236,728	390,108	349,818
Smoked herring	439,687	244,886	782,601
Herring in brine	133,231	134,378	104,261
Shrimp	7,601	3,641	-
Other crustaceans	4,922	17,195	-
TOTAL	854,490	908,990	1,262,119

Table 2.--Liberian fishery imports, by value (in US\$), 1968-70.

COMMODITY	1968	1969	1970
Fresh or frozen fish	18,532	39,115	11,229
Stockfish (dried cod)	83,950	94,470	108,557
Smoked herring	78,278	49,361	20,099
Herring in brine	32,241	35,107	30,207
Shrimp	10,342	4,025	-
Other crustaceans	6,327	18,556	-
TOTAL	229,670	240,634	170,092

It is interesting to note that the quantity of imports in 1970 increased by 39 percent over 1969 and by 40 percent over 1968, but the value of imports in 1970 decreased significantly in relation to these 2 years. A notable absence of shrimp and other crustaceans is apparent for 1970.

Liberian fishery exports for the same period are as follows:

Table 3.--Liberian fishery exports, by quantity (in lbs.), 1968-70.

COMMODITY	1968	1969	1970
Fresh or frozen fish	67,514	247,535	451,366
Salted, dried, or smoked fish	8,156	1,252	-
Shrimp, fresh or frozen	6,913	612,946	1,675,673
Other crustaceans	9,446	8,064	-
TOTAL	92,029	869,797	2,127,039

Table 4.--Liberian fishery exports, by value (in US\$), 1968-70.

COMMODITY	1968	1969	1970
Fresh or frozen fish	10,854	37,665	42,900
Salted, dried, or smoked fish	3,578	353	-
Shrimp, fresh or frozen	6,277	524,240	1,760,908
Other crustaceans	4,200	8,668	-
TOTAL	24,909	570,926	1,803,808

IV. FISHING ACTIVITIES

A. Modern

With the purchase of Grimes and Cooper Fish Company by the Mesurado Fishing Company in 1971, Mesurado became the only modern producer and distributor of fresh or frozen sea food in Liberia. Their activities continue to expand along with the number of vessels which supply them. In 1971, there were 49 vessels fishing out of Monrovia. They included eight Italian trawlers 70- to 100-foot long and four 75-foot German trawlers, all fishing for finfish. The remaining 37 vessels were shrimp-fish draggers, of which 12 were company-owned vessels, 15 Greek, and 10 U.S. vessels. Most of the company's new boats built in the United States were specially designed for local conditions. They are 70 to 80 feet long, have a beam of 20 to 22 feet, and are powered by 359-hp. Caterpillar engines. Three boats were built in Holland and are powered by 500-hp. Deutz diesels. All have auxiliaries for refrigerating the holds, which have a capacity of 40 tons.^{1/}

^{1/} Lane, Capt. M. "Liberia Builds Up Its Fisheries," World Fishing, April 1971.

The Italian and German vessels (which carry a crew of 8-10 men in addition to a captain and engineer) sort their finfish catches on board, store them in 22-lb. boxes, and unload their catches at Monrovia for final processing. The Polish and Japanese trawlers, whose landings are included under imports, partially sort their catches on board and freeze them in 66-lb. and 44-lb. boxes, respectively.

In contrast to the shrimp fishery of the United States, where only small quantities of the more desirable finfish species are saved, the Liberian vessels save everything of marketable size. The shrimp and fish are first separated and processed on board. The most abundant of the locally favorite fish species---sole, sea bream, and croaker--- are sorted by species and boxed for freezing.

Shrimp vessels which grade, pack, and freeze their catches on board have a 10-man crew in addition to the captain and engineer. Most of these captains and mates are from the North European countries. Vessels which use the glucose-dip method to preserve their catch have a 6- to 7-man crew in addition to the captain and engineer. Processing of their catch is completed ashore. The vessels are all fitted out for double rig shrimp trawling using 72-foot otter trawls. A small try net is towed from the port side.

Mesurado has a chain of 13 frozen fish distribution centers scattered throughout Liberia. Three of these centers have 100-ton freezer capacities, and the remaining 10 have 25-ton freezer capacities. Nine refrigerated trucks serve these centers. All shrimp are exported and are not distributed locally.

Shrimp processing equipment for unloadings, grading, peeling and deveining are installed in a well-designed plant. Personnel in a quality control laboratory make continuous tests during processing. Plant cleanliness is given a high priority by all employees. A machine shop, carpenter shop, net shop, electronic repair shop, and a spare parts and equipment shop help make the entire operation self-sufficient.

B. Artisanal

Current information on the canoe fishery is not available because funds for a statistical program were cut from the Fisheries Department's budget several years ago. These fishermen fish primarily for bonga (Ethmalosa fimbriata) and sardines (Sardinella eba), using seines. The fish are sold in wholesale lots to the aggressive village women fish peddlers found throughout West Africa. Liberian "Kru's" and Ghanaian "Fantis" are the traditional fishing tribes of the area. Their production has been estimated at approximately 150 tons per year; however, it is assumed their production has declined because the mechanized fleet now supplies the large Monrovian market and other coastal areas.

V. NEW DEVELOPMENTS

The American company affiliated with Mesurado, Continental Seafood Co., added seven new shrimp vessels in 1971 to bring their total in Liberia to 10 vessels. Mesurado has three shrimp vessels on order for delivery in 1972 and plans an increase to 15 vessels.

Another 150-foot pier has been built providing space for four shrimp vessels. With the two 150-foot piers already in use, there is dock space for 12 vessels.

Three new 10-ton-per-day plate freezers are being installed, which will increase the daily freezing capacity to 50 tons. A new IQF (individually quick frozen) plant is freezing 1,000 pounds of shrimp per day for a special export pack.

A 300-ton capacity, U.S.-made, electrically operated drydock was installed at Mesurado's plant in 1971. It has a 100-foot-long and 32-foot-wide platform. Ten fishing vessels and harbor tugs were serviced during its first 3 weeks of operation.