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TROCHUS FISHING IN NEW CALEDONIA

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SUMMARY

Trochus (*Trochus niloticus*) is a gastropod found on the reefs of the intertropical indo-west Pacific region. Its shell is used for mother-of-pearl, and has been exported from New Caledonia since the beginning of the century. In 1978, the total quantity exported was 1,900 tonnes, i.e. over 30% of world production. This record tonnage followed the "mining boom" period, during which there was little interest in trochus fishing. Enough time was therefore available for stock renewal following intensive harvests throughout the 1950s.

According to studies conducted at ORSTOM by tagging trochus growth is relatively fast during the first three years, and then declines sharply. Approximately 10 years are necessary to obtain a base diameter of 12 centimeters.

It should be mentioned that trochus meat is eaten by fishermen, but a large quantity goes to waste; however, approximately 100 tonnes of frozen meat was exported to Japan in 1978.

Trochus fishing is practised by Melanesians living in the New Caledonia coastal villages mainly on the north-west coast. The Melanesians usually collect trochus on the reef flats at low tide, whereas the Polynesians dive on the reef slopes and, in 1978 obtained yields of up to one tonne of live trochus per man per day.

Trochus stocks in New Caledonia do not seem seriously endangered at present and only a few reef flats are visibly overfished. Current legislation, prohibiting the harvesting of trochus measuring less than 8 cm in diameter, will probably have to be tightened eventually to allow the renewal of some local stocks.