

line. All branch lines forward of the ones that have hooked the fish are detached from the main line when hauling in, and the lures are hung over the side of the boat to prevent tangling.

The fisherman must be very careful when hauling in big fish, such as 20–30 kg yellowfin or bigeye tunas, as these can pull very powerfully and cause the branch lines to whip dangerously. The boats either set sail early in the morning and return at night, or spend the night offshore.

FISHING SEASON, GROUNDS AND CATCH

The fishing season extends from April to October, with the most intensive fishing being carried

out in July. The major fishing grounds are around the FADs that were established within 18–20 miles from the coast.

The main catch consists of yellowfin tuna, bigeye tuna and skipjack, with wahoo, mahi-mahi and marlin also being caught.

When yellowfin and bigeye tuna are caught, they are placed on a sponge mat, the top portion of their brain is cut and a hard nylon line is driven into the spinal cord to kill the fish quickly before it is gilled, gutted and stored in ice-water. It can then be sold on the market as sashimi-grade tuna.



Electrical line hauler

Stern view of a fishing boat carrying two Jumbo trolling poles

Drift fishing with live atule ¹

by Aymeric Desurmont

One of the most popular fishing technique used around FADs in Reunion Island is drift fishing, using a live atule (*Selar crumenophthalmus*) as bait. Like most pelagic species, atule—called ‘pêche-cavale’ by the locals—are difficult to keep alive, so fishermen need to go and catch them a few hours before FAD fishing commences..

ATULE JIG-FISHING

This very simple technique is used at night at the entrance of the bays where atule tend to gather.

The fishing gear consists of a main line made of very thin nylon monofilament (ø 0.3–0.4 mm) carrying five short snoods (0.15 m of ø 0.2–0.3 mm) with lures. Lures are made with tiny hooks and small lengths of shiny knitting wool—some fishermen even add fluorescent beads close to the hooks.

Normally the boat, which is drifting while the fishing takes place, carries a lamp hung over the side to attract the fish—this fishing technique can be used from a canoe. The line is lowered to 5–10 m

¹ Based on information given by Max Chane Tao and Emmanuel Tessier, CRPMEM, 238 rue du Maréchal Gallieni, 97820 Le Port, La Réunion, France

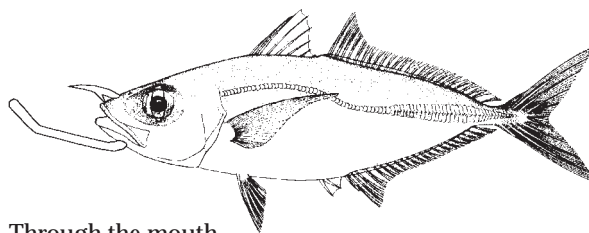
and then hand-jigged while slowly brought back to the surface.

The catch is kept in a big bucket full of seawater. On boats equipped with electrics, a pump is used to create a permanent circulation of fresh seawater in the bucket. On smaller boats, buckets are used to replace part of the water regularly.

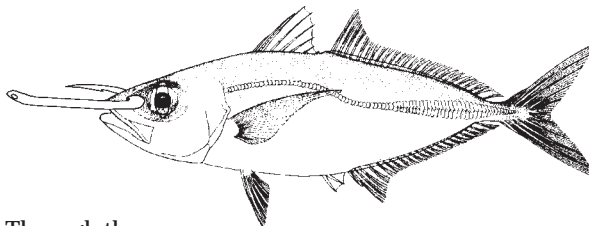
DRIFT-FISHING AROUND FADS

The fishing gear used for this technique is very basic: one man, one line, one hook. Some fishermen use rod-and-reel with a nylon monofilament ($\approx \varnothing 0.5$ mm) or Dacron line, others just use handlines— $\varnothing 1.5$ – 2 mm nylon monofilament or tar-coated nylon threaded lines.

They all use 'tuna hooks' (no. 5–7/0) or 'swordfish hooks' (Eagle Claw L9014 size 8/0, or equivalent).



Through the mouth,
from underneath



Through the nose

Figure 2: Two ways of hooking the live atule for drift-fishing

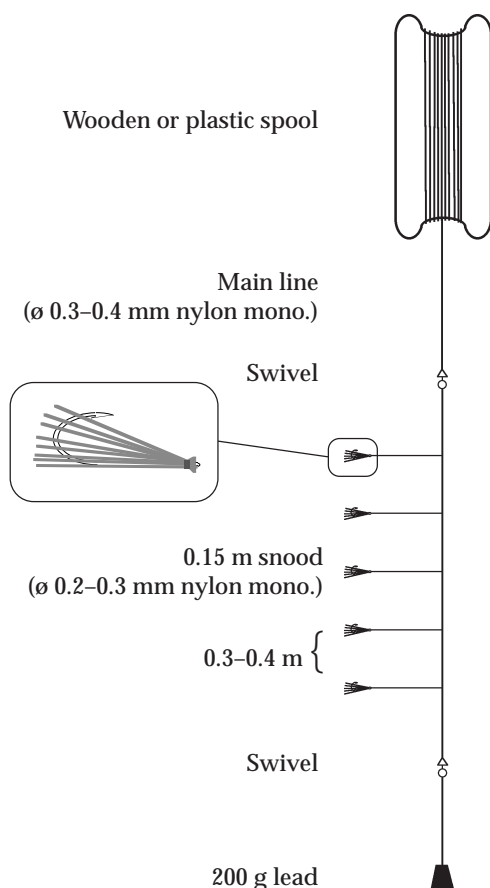


Figure 1: Fishing gear used to catch atule (*Selar crumenophthalmus*)

The boat is stopped up-current from the FAD, the live atule is carefully hooked through the mouth, from underneath, or sideways through the nose (see Figure 2) and put in the water. About 50 m of line are paid out and left slack.

When a fish bites, the fisherman pays out more line to allow time for the fish to swallow the bait.

Unlike trolling-lures, which are fast moving targets attacked by the fish, a drifting target is usually carefully approached by the predator, which may 'nibble' two or three times before swallowing it. Therefore, it is very important not to strike immediately at the first bite as this may scare the fish away.

When the drift is too fast because of the wind or the current, the boat may be moved slowly—using oars on small boats or the engine on bigger boats—to try to keep the line as near vertical as possible.

As with most techniques targeting tunas or marlins, best results are obtained at dawn or at dusk. This technique is also used successfully, at any time of the day, to catch mahi-mahi (*Coryphaena hippurus*) very close (less than 500 m) to the FAD. 