

Whatever the 'true' ending of this tale may be, the fact that the rat insulted the octopus is considered the reason that ever since then, the octopus seeks revenge against the rat for its betrayal. As a result, the Tongan *maka feke* lure resembles the shape of a rat.

The *maka feke* lure is expertly crafted. A carefully selected cone-shaped stone of enough weight to avoid floating, constitutes its main part. Half of this stone is covered with a cowrie shell to mimic the rat's fur. The rat's 'feet' are made from palm tree leaves, which are also used for the long 'tail'. Palm tree root material is used to fix all components together. A line is tied to the lure with which it is lowered into the water. On one trip with fishermen from Manuka village on Tongatapu, the lure was used on a shallow coral reef. Here, the line was lowered into the water and rhythmically shaken up and down, about one metre above the bottom. After about an hour, a medium-sized octopus darted towards the lure and grabbed it. In the same moment, the fisherman jiggling the lure quickly caught the octopus with his free hand.



The lure is lowered into the shallow water above coral ground and rhythmically shaken up and down to attract octopus.



An octopus attracted by the lure, darts towards it and grabs it.

The octopus is killed and cut into small pieces to be used as bait for handline fishing.



The octopus was killed and cut into small pieces for use as bait for handline fishing. The fishing party preceded to a known fishing ground, where five handlines, each equipped with a sole hook with octopus bait, were lowered into the water. Within 2.5 hours, 20.4 kg of reef fish were caught using the medium-sized (1.2 kg) octopus caught with the *maka feke* lure.

References

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Tongkah – Unique gear for catching octopus

By P. Balan, Penang Inshore Fishermen Welfare Association

Changkat is a small village in Seberang Perai Selatan (Malaysia) where Malays, Chinese and Indians live within their individual communities, yet side-by-side with each other. The village is not very remote but there is no public transport to it.

The Changkat jetty is quite a distance from the village and it is a 10-minute motorcycle ride to reach it. The jetty at Tengah River, which is also the river that marks the boundary of Batu Kawan island from this side, is home to almost 20 boats. Like Changkat village, and unlike most small jetties in Penang, the fishermen are multi ethnic: Malays, Chinese and Indians.

The jetty by the river is about 400 metres to the sea and flanked on every side by beautiful, lush mangrove forest. The fishermen here prefer to fish at night rather than during the day, which is the norm in other areas. It is here that the practice of using 'tongkah' to catch small octopus is found. Tongkah is unique to Penang State and to the whole of Malaysia.

A tongkah is 7 1/2 feet in length and 15 inches wide, and looks somewhat like a surfboard. It has a 'hand stand' for the arm to rest. A rope is set at the front for the user to manipulate the tongkah on the mudflat. A sack is tied to the armrest where the catch is thrown into as the tongkah moves.

Because octopus fishing is done at night, the fishermen use carbide as their source of fuel for their light source. It is not only cheap but also emits very strong light.

A tongkah is very easy to use once you get the hang of it. Since the purpose of using it is to catch small octopus that are trapped on mudflats at night, the fishermen must know exactly when the tide is low and the location where octopus can be found. Hence a fisherman go out just before the tide falls and place a pole into the mudflats for the boats to be tied to and wait. As the tide drops, a fisherman prepares his tongkah.

First, the armrest is placed on the tongkah and the rope is prepared. Carbide is then put into a container with a funnel. When water is added, the carbide emits gas at the end of the funnel. With the strike of a match, the modified torchlight is now ready to be used. A sack is then tied to the armrest, and the tongkah is set onto the mudflat.

The fisherman's left arm rests on the armrest while holding the carbide torchlight. His right arm is used to catch the octopus. One of his legs is placed on the tongkah while his other free leg pushes the tongkah forward along the mudflat.

The search for octopus starts immediately, and the fisherman does not stop until the tide comes back almost two hours later. On a good day, as much as 15 kg of octopus can be gotten.

When octopus are abundant, the scene on the mudflat is like a festival with many fishermen on their tongkahs gliding along the mudflat with a strong beam of light, on the lookout for the shy animal. The fisherman must be quick because once an octopus feels threatened, it quickly disappears into the mud.

One fisherman explained, "The tongkah has been used here for as long as I can remember". He is rightly proud of this tradition that has served him and his fellow fishermen well.

The Lakemba art of *vono*

By Dr Mecki Kronen, SPC Community Fisheries Scientist



On Lakemba, a small island in the southern Lau Group of Fiji Islands, there are women who are still regularly perform the old Fijian tradition of catching fish called, *vono*. Due to specific habitat requirements along with fishing strategies specific to Lakemba, this fishing

method is exclusive to fisherwomen from the villages of Nasaqalau and Waitabu only.

A *vono* comprises three different steps, involves at least four women, and about four different fishing methods. The overall strategy is to prepare a hiding place where fish can be trapped and easily harvested.

Although *vono* is considered an easy way to catch fish, it requires a substantial amount of effort and patience. There are three steps involved. Step one: At low tide a group of women head towards the outermost reef that fringes the lagoon. Their faces are blackened with charcoal to protect from sunburn, and they carry a couple of freshly cut leafy branches. The women know suitable places at the outer reef line that have been continuously used in the past. Suitable sites are natural holes in the hard coral cover that can be easily enlarged and deep-

ened. Every time one of the sites is selected, large hard coral blocks and pieces, and hand-fulls of coral debris are scooped out until a smooth basin is created. The basin may measure about 1–1.5 m² and may be 0.80–1.00 m deep. The basin is then carefully covered using large flat coral pieces. The *vono* site is now marked with some of the leafy branches, which are stacked into coral holes. Thus, the site will be easily identifiable if approaching from distance. Big pieces of hard coral are collected and laid in two, 100-m-long lines reaching from the sides of the *vono* radially in the direction of the beach. These blocks will be used to hold in place the nets to be set later on.

After completing step one, women may reef glean, or *qoli*, a kind of group netting in shallow water

