

1 **Title:** ‘Do fish scales matter? Diversification and differentiation in seafood commodity
2 chains’

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21

22 **ABSTRACT**

23 Recent studies in the literature on fisheries trade have contrasted the challenges and opportunities
24 associated with domestic and internationally oriented fish trade. We examine in detail forms of
25 domestic and international fish trade in a municipality of the Philippines to show the empirical
26 complexities of how fish trade unfolds on the ground. We draw on insights from literature in
27 livelihoods to highlight how the debate on fisheries trade can benefit from closer attention to the
28 social and economic context of fisher livelihoods. We argue that from the perspective of small-scale
29 producers who are focused on maintaining diversified livelihoods across a range of fisheries, the
30 distinctions between domestic and international fish trade blur locally, and are sometimes of limited
31 relevance when assessing livelihood options and outcomes for small-scale producers. Instead, a
32 more important distinction is how each trade articulates with social differentiation based on

33 ownership of fishing assets. We suggest that household asset characteristics strongly influence how
34 they can access a broad range of fisheries (both domestically and internationally traded) that often
35 co-emerge in rural areas of the Philippines.

36

37 **1. INTRODUCTION**

38 Scholars and practitioners are increasingly debating about the comparative challenges and
39 opportunities generated by international fisheries trade (Béné et al. 2010a, 2016; Crona et al. 2015;
40 Marschke and Betcherman 2015). Central to this analysis has been interrogating the ideal scale of
41 market integration for poverty alleviation, economic growth and food security: comparing regional,
42 or domestic, fish trade with global, or international fish trade¹. On the one hand, proponents of
43 international fish trade suggest that such trade will bring increased wealth to developing nation-
44 states through increased foreign exchange earnings and economic growth, the effects of which will
45 eventually trickle-down to communities – drawing on ideas from neo-classical economic theory
46 (Cunningham et al. 2009; World Bank/FAO 2009). In contrast, critical scholars and activists argue
47 that international fish trade may heighten food insecurity (Kaczynski and Fluharty 2002; Mulekom et
48 al. 2006), and that the positive returns from fish trade are rarely invested back into local populations
49 and so their effects on poverty alleviation are limited (Béné et al. 2010b). From an environmental
50 perspective, international fish trade has also been identified as a key cause of overfishing and
51 declining fish stocks (Jackson et al. 2001; Cinner et al. 2013). In addition to the traditional policy and
52 donor focus on international markets, therefore, domestic fish trade is now receiving greater
53 scholarly and policy attention as a potential means to improve food security and poverty alleviation
54 (e.g. Béné et al. 2010a; HLPE 2015; WorldFish 2015). Domestic and international fish trade are

¹ The distinctions between ‘local’, ‘domestic’, ‘regional’ vs ‘international’ and ‘global’ have different terms in different contexts. The term ‘regional’, for example, is sometimes taken to mean a focus on intra-African fish trade (e.g. WorldFish 2015), but in the context of the Philippines refers to an agglomeration of several provinces. In this paper we use the terms domestic to mean traded within a country, and international to refer to trading between two or more countries.

55 therefore often implicitly and explicitly viewed to be two distinct types of fish trade, with different
56 sets of outcomes for producers.

57 In this paper, we caution against the adoption of generalised promotion of either international or
58 domestic fish trade in varied local settings. While from external viewpoints the differences between
59 international and domestic fish trade may appear quite clear, there is now a considerable literature
60 in geography demonstrating that scale (of trade or otherwise) is not a natural or given phenomenon,
61 but highly socially produced and contested (Swyngedouw and Heynen 2003; Neumann 2009).
62 Accordingly, it becomes problematic to reify scale and assume enduring characteristics with any
63 fixed 'scalar arrangement' (Born and Purcell 2006: 197). This extends to the scale of fish trade,
64 where we suggest that an undue pre-occupation with the scale of fish trade can potentially lead to
65 the promotion of policies that are disconnected from the perspectives and priorities of small-scale
66 producers². Instead, it remains crucial to understand how domestic and international fish trade
67 unfolds for small-scale producers on the ground.

68 We examine in detail forms of fish trade in a municipality of the Philippines to show the empirical
69 complexities of how households negotiate multiple types of fisheries trade. We draw on insights
70 from literature in livelihoods to highlight how the debate on fisheries trade can benefit from closer
71 attention to the social and economic context of fishers. We argue that from the perspective of small-
72 scale producers that are focused on maintaining diversified livelihoods across a range of fisheries,
73 the distinctions between domestic and international fish trade blur locally, and are sometimes of
74 limited relevance when trying to understand specific outcomes and livelihood options for small-scale
75 producers. We argue that from the perspective of producers, categorising fisheries by whether they
76 are produced for domestic or international trade is of limited relevance. Instead, a more important
77 distinction is how each trade articulates with households in terms of social differentiation based on

² Although the term 'producer' is often used to refer to producers of aquaculture products, in this paper we use the term to refer to catchers and processors of capture fishery products.

78 ownership of fishing assets. We suggest that household asset characteristics strongly influence how
79 households can access a broad range of fisheries (both domestically and internationally traded) that
80 often co-emerge in rural areas of the Philippines.

81 After this introduction and a discussion of the methods, we introduce the debate about domestic
82 and international fish trade in more detail and discuss literature from livelihoods that highlights the
83 importance of the social and institutional context of trade. We then describe the different features
84 of the major types of fisheries trade in San Vicente, a municipality in Palawan province, Philippines.
85 Our analysis then focuses on how a better understanding of the social and economic context of
86 producers – in particular, forms of livelihood diversification across different types of fisheries, and
87 social differentiation within these fisheries – provides a view of fisheries trade that is more closely
88 aligned with the perspectives and priorities of local fishers than a focus on whether such trade is (or
89 should be) domestically or internationally oriented.

90 **2. FISH TRADE, CONTEXT AND LIVELIHOODS**

91 Proponents of international fish trade suggest that fish exports will provide high cash incomes for
92 producers, generate economic growth and provide increased revenue for governments, which will
93 ultimately lead to poverty alleviation and improved food security (e.g. World Bank/FAO 2009). As
94 Béné et al. (2010b, 2016) point out, however, these arguments tend to rely on the usually untested
95 assumptions that ‘exploiting rising demand in export markets is an unproblematic means of wealth
96 generation’ (Béné et al. 2016: 185). Frequently, this argument is linked to a broader rhetoric about
97 the financial value of marine resources, and the importance of realising this value (e.g. Cunningham
98 et al. 2009; Hoegh-Guldberg et al. 2015). Informed strongly by neo-classical economic theory, this
99 perspective has achieved a great deal of prominence among policymakers in recent years.

100 In contrast, critics of international trade have argued that international fish trade contributes to
101 both local food insecurity and poverty. They argue that such international trade exports fish that
102 would otherwise be consumed locally (e.g. Mulekom et al. 2006), that returns from fish exports are

103 often not invested locally so local fishers subsequently capture few of the benefits (Béné et al.
104 2010b, Sadovy de Mitcheson and Yin 2014), and that increased trade can in some cases increase
105 local prices (Béné et al. 2016: 185). Partly in response to these critiques, some scholars have
106 promoted domestic fish trade. The authors of the recent High Level Panel of Experts on Sustainable
107 Fisheries and Aquaculture for Food Security and Nutrition (2015), for example, suggest that for
108 small-scale producers who may not produce one of the relatively small number of internationally-
109 traded species, greater demand at a domestic level may exist for diverse types of seafood products.
110 Domestic fish trade would also offer fewer barriers to entry for small-scale producers, many of
111 whom are marginalised by constraints such as strict regulatory conditions for food safety (Henson et
112 al. 2000) or environmental sustainability (Ponte 2012). It would also generate a greater supply of fish
113 locally, contributing to food security goals. Finally, it would more generally re-orient private and
114 public investment in the small-scale sector, with consequential impacts on food security and
115 nutrition (HLPE 2015: 62-63).

116 Beyond this specific debate, international and domestic fisheries are often held to be discrete types
117 of fish trade with different characteristics. The distribution of benefits from internationally-traded
118 fisheries, for example, are frequently viewed, implicitly and explicitly, as generating higher levels of
119 inequality than locally-traded fisheries (Fabinyi et al. 2012; ADB 2014; Wamukota et al. 2014; Sadovy
120 de Mitcheson and Yin 2014). In this way, the differences between international and domestic
121 fisheries trade have tended to harden in much of the literature.

122 This debate about the normative ideal scale of fish trade engages a range of important larger-scale
123 concerns that have significant implications for local producers, including the relevance of
124 certification and standards, and how fish supply affects food security. In particular, arguments for
125 greater attention to domestic fish trade provide a valuable corrective to the unexamined
126 assumptions about capturing wealth and increasing 'efficiency' prevalent in much mainstream
127 fisheries policy discourse (cf. Béné et al. 2016: 185). However, it is not our goal to add to these

128 critiques – in part because they are already well articulated³. Instead, we suggest that from the
129 perspective of local fish producers, whether or not fish is domestically or internationally traded is
130 less relevant than a range of other concerns. As geographers writing on the social construction of
131 scale have discussed at a conceptual level, the characteristics of a particular scale or scalar
132 arrangement cannot be assumed *a priori*, and no particular scale is inherently more desirable than
133 another in terms of local perspective (Brown and Purcell 2005: 608-609). In the same way, we
134 suggest that the ideal scale of fish trade cannot be assumed, and that from the perspective of local
135 fish producers, the final destination of the seafood product can be of limited relevance.

136 In this paper, we argue that further attention needs to be directed at how domestic and
137 international fish trade unfolds for producers in context. We argue for greater attention to the
138 broader social and economic context in which domestic and international fish trade takes place, and
139 in particular, the livelihood context of small-scale producers. We suggest that from the perspective
140 of a producer with a diversified livelihood, distinctions about the scale of fish trade are of often
141 limited relevance. Instead, for local producers, more important ways of understanding different
142 types of fisheries relate to the level of capitalisation and profitability of the fishery, and their
143 position within the particular fishery they are most engaged with.

144 Our call for greater attention to the socio-economic context in studies of fish trade resonates with
145 recent shifts in studies of trade in international development more broadly. In the social sciences,
146 the concept of ‘global production networks’, for example, has developed partly from a critique of
147 the earlier ‘global value chain’ approach (Coe et al. 2008). Many global value chain studies have
148 tended to focus primarily on inter-firm relations, or the linear, ‘vertical’ relationships among
149 participants in a value chain, with a narrow focus on economic upgrading. In contrast, one of the
150 contributions of the literature on global production networks has been to highlight how elements of

³ Additionally, a range of types of fisheries trade are likely to be appropriate in different contexts (Andrew et al. 2007; Ratner and Allison 2012).

151 social context, or ‘horizontal’ relationships such as culture, the state, and social relationships are of
152 key importance when trying to understand distributional and governance outcomes (Coe et al. 2008;
153 Hamilton-Hart and Stringer 2015). As Bolwig et al. (2010: 178) note, ‘attention has to be paid both to
154 the vertical links – the value chains that link local livelihoods upstream and downstream to distant
155 networks of production and exchange – and to the horizontal ones – the ways in which the impact
156 and nature of integration into globalised systems are locally mediated’⁴. By focusing on the scale of
157 market integration (i.e. domestic vs international), we suggest that the debate about domestic and
158 international fish trade runs the risk of over-emphasising the vertical links of value chains at the
159 expense of sufficient attention to the horizontal contexts where trade unfolds.

160 Our analysis of this ‘horizontal’ context of fish trade stems from a detailed focus on the livelihoods of
161 fish producers. Following Ellis, ‘A livelihood comprises the assets (natural, physical, human, financial
162 and social capital), the activities, and the access to these (mediated by institutions and social
163 relations) that together determine the living gained by the individual or household’ (Ellis 2000: 10).
164 Livelihood analyses have a long history in the international development literature, with a range of
165 emphases and components (see Scoones 2009 for a review). The sustainable livelihoods approach
166 became particularly prominent from the late 1990s and was incorporated into much policy and
167 planning , including in the marine sector (Ferrol-Schulte et al. 2013). More recently, a range of
168 critiques of the sustainable livelihoods approach have emerged, drawing attention to its largely
169 apolitical and inflexible, technocratic nature, and its pre-occupation with material assets at the
170 expense of less tangible assets. In the critical literature, more contemporary livelihood analyses now
171 speak of ‘livelihood trajectories’ (McLean 2015) or ‘livelihoods as intimate government’ (Carr 2013).

⁴ Similarly, work in economic anthropology has long emphasised the ways in which economic activity needs to be considered within wider frames of social relationships (Carrier 2012). In fisheries contexts, for example, economic anthropologists have discussed the role of distinctive cultural institutions that interact with economic activity, including patron-client relationships (Firth 1966[1944]; Adhuri et al. 2016) and the role of gifts, sharing and re-distribution of wealth (e.g. Russell and Alexander 2000; Segi 2014).

172 While duly recognising that livelihoods have multiple components, for the purposes of this paper we
173 focus on two core concepts in the livelihoods literature: diversification and asset holdings. Analysing
174 these two components of livelihoods highlights that from the perspective of producers, the
175 distinctions between domestic and international fish trade are not always as clear as they might
176 appear to be for policymakers.

177 Firstly, following Ellis, 'livelihood diversification is defined as the process by which rural families
178 construct a diverse portfolio of activities and social support capabilities in their struggle for survival
179 and in order to improve their standard of living' (1998: 4). Recognition of diversification has long
180 been a focus of the livelihoods literature, and has been important in moving international
181 development policy away from an undue preoccupation with single sectors (Allison and Ellis 2001).
182 Fishers, for example, may take up fishing as one option among a broader suite of livelihood options
183 and social relations – their social identity is not simply as 'fishers', and their economic interests are
184 not simply associated with 'fishing' (Allison and Ellis 2001; Eder 2003; Allison and Horemans 2006).
185 Even when their income may be derived solely or largely from fishing, fishers in the Philippines will
186 usually participate in a range of fisheries over the course of a year, using multiple gears to target
187 different species that are traded to different places (Pido 1995; Fabinyi 2012). We highlight that
188 because of the diverse livelihood portfolios fishing households usually hold, the outcomes associated
189 with domestic and international trade are difficult to disaggregate. Essentially, just because fishers
190 may be involved with one type of fish trade does not mean that their livelihood is solely concerned
191 with this type of fish trade. This means that in the context of a diversified livelihood portfolio, where
192 income is drawn from multiple sources annually, the question of whether a fishery is domestically or
193 internationally traded is not the most important or relevant issue for small-scale producers.

194 Secondly, we emphasise the significance of differentiation within fishing communities. There are
195 many ways of understanding differentiation within fishing communities, and the distinctions
196 between different types of fishers are often not as clear as they may be in comparable agricultural

197 communities. Fishers are often differentiated on the basis of the type of technology employed, the
198 relative scale of equipment used, or whether production is operated by kin- or non-kin (Russell and
199 Poopetch 1990; McGoodwin 1991; Jentoft and Chuenpagdee 2015). In the Philippines, for example,
200 capture fisheries are formally divided into the municipal (roughly corresponding to the more widely
201 used term of ‘small-scale fisheries’) and commercial sectors (also referred to as large-scale or
202 industrial fisheries)⁵. In this paper we adapt Bernstein’s definition of differentiation as ‘the tendency
203 of petty commodity producers to divide into classes of capital and labour’ (2010: 125). We focus on
204 the role that ownership of fishing assets plays in the livelihoods of fish producers. As scholars in the
205 political economy of fisheries have argued (Platteau 1984; Campling et al. 2012; Howard 2012), ‘who
206 owns what’ (cf. Bernstein 2010) – in fishing communities the boat and fishing gears – plays a key role
207 in differentiation. Although the literature on livelihoods emphasises the role of multiple assets
208 (natural, physical, human, financial and social), we focus here on how the ownership of fishing assets
209 (i.e. physical) is more important for livelihoods than the question of whether trade in fish is
210 domestically or internationally oriented. Specific rules for profit sharing systems in the Philippines
211 greatly favour the owners of fishing assets – simply put, those with more assets and fishing capital
212 do better than those without such assets (recognizing also that physical assets can leverage financial
213 and social capital). Sometimes these capital assets are held in domestically traded fisheries, and
214 sometimes in internationally traded fisheries, but each fisher’s asset base may produce for either
215 market. We argue that social differentiation within communities is therefore a much more
216 significant driver of outcomes associated with fisheries trade than the narrower one of which type of
217 fisheries trade one is involved in.

218 **3. METHODS AND BACKGROUND TO FIELDSITE**

⁵ Under the 1991 Local Government Code and 1998 Fisheries Code of the Philippines, the fisheries within 15 kilometres from the shoreline are allocated for municipal fishers. Commercial fishing boats are those greater than three gross tons, and are restricted to fishing outside of this zone.

219 This paper draws on fieldwork from 2014-2015 in the municipality of San Vicente, Palawan province,
220 Philippines. San Vicente has a population of 30,919 and, facing the South China Sea on the west
221 coast of Palawan province, lies 186km from the provincial capital, Puerto Princesa City (see Figure 1).
222 Palawan is marked by a relative abundance of fishery resources and a high level of socio-cultural
223 diversity. Indigenous ethno-linguistic groups living along the southern, central and northern coasts of
224 Palawan include the Tagbanua (north-central), Pala'wan (central-south), and Molbog (south).
225 However, Palawan's coastal fishing communities are largely composed of migrant settlers who have
226 arrived in the province from across the Philippines. In recent decades, settlers have typically left
227 locations of environmental degradation and social conflict to the relatively peaceful, resource-
228 abundant environment of Palawan (Eder 2008). In this study we focus primarily on migrant (non-
229 indigenous) fishers, noting that although the sample is not comprehensive for the broader region,
230 the vast majority of coastal residents in Palawan are migrants.

231

232 **Figure 1: Map of municipalities of Palawan province, Philippines.**

233 In August 2014, we conducted 15 interviews in two communities in San Vicente, and three focus
234 group discussions (FGDs). In 2015, we conducted a further 34 interviews and 28 interviews in June
235 and November, respectively. Interviewees were selected through stratified sampling to include
236 households of different ethnicity, class, and livelihood strategy (e.g. different types of fishing gears).
237 We interviewed fishers, traders, and government officials. The topics for interviews and focus group
238 discussions focused on life histories with an emphasis on livelihood change over time, possession of
239 assets, livelihood strategies, and social differentiation within the coastal communities. A smaller
240 sample of these interviews examined in greater depth household decision-making in fishing
241 activities, and the costs and profits associated with different types of fishing and other income-
242 generating activities. Interviews were conducted in Tagalog, which is the national *lingua franca* and
243 spoken by community members. Detailed fieldnotes were taken each day during fieldwork, and

244 these fieldnotes were subsequently manually coded and qualitatively analysed for key themes that
245 emerged (Bernard 2006).

246 **4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

247 **4.1 Fisheries trade in San Vicente**

248 As elsewhere in the coastal Philippines assorted fishery activities are present in San Vicente. These
249 fisheries operate at a range of levels of capitalisation, which produce a large diversity of seafood
250 products that are traded to various domestic and international locations (see Table 1). At the lowest
251 level of capitalisation are small boats without an engine; fishers will use these boats to fish in
252 inshore waters with hook and line and other simple gears such as traps, squid jigs (*ganti-ganti*) and,
253 less often, nets. The next level of capitalisation will be slightly larger boats with an engine. On these
254 boats, fishers may use hook and line to fish for live fish, squid jigs, or a range of nets. Larger boats
255 still will have a much larger engine, crew of up to 10-20, and very large nets (ringnets).

256 Small pelagic and demersal fish, including scads (*Decapterus*), mackerel (*Rastrelliger*), ponyfish
257 (*Leiognathidae*), sardines (*Sardinella*) and threadfin bream (*Nemipterus*) are caught by hook and line
258 or various types of nets and are traded domestically. They are consumed and sold locally within San
259 Vicente, or transported via truck or smaller traders using motorbikes to neighbouring municipalities
260 such as Taytay and Roxas, or all the way to Puerto Princesa City. Some higher-valued fish such as
261 dried threadfin bream are transported all the way to Iloilo City on neighbouring Panay Island, or to
262 Manila.

263 Squid (*Sepioteuthis lessoniana*) and live reef food fish (*Plectropomus leopardus*) are exported
264 internationally. For the squid fishery, fishers will sell either to a range of middlemen or directly to
265 one of four exporters based in San Vicente. These exporters are all agents or branches of larger
266 companies, headquartered in either Manila or Iloilo City. The squid will be transported by truck to
267 Puerto Princesa, and from there flown to Manila. From Manila, the squid is exported to either

268 Taiwan or Japan. For the live reef fish fishery, fishers will sell either to a middleman or direct to one
269 of the six larger traders based in San Vicente town. Three of the six traders are agents or branches of
270 larger exporting companies, based in Manila. From San Vicente, the fish are transported to the
271 nearest commercial airport in Roxas, from where the live products are flown to Manila and then on
272 to Hong Kong.

273 Other common fishing techniques include fish traps and corrals, spearfishing, crab traps, and
274 gleaning.

275 Table 1 summarises the different types of fishing activities in San Vicente, organised by level of
276 capitalisation.

Fishery name	Share system	Start-up costs	Cost of average trip	Targeted species	Simplified commodity chain	Season	Range of catch and price
Hook and line (<i>Kawil</i>)	Own catch is kept, one share to boat owner.	USD20-40 ⁶	USD2-4 for a day trip.	Threadfin bream (<i>Nemipterus</i>)	Fisher→Middleman→Roxas, Taytay and/or Puerto Princesa. When dried, they will reach Manila.	No season	5-10kg, USD0.50-1.60/kg
Squid (<i>Pusit</i>)	If boat only supplied, then 20% to the owner, 80% to crew. If expenses also supplied, then 33% to owner, rest to crew.	USD1490-2130	USD2-4 expenses for an overnight trip.	Bigfin Reef Squid (<i>Sepioteuthis lessoniana</i>)	Fisher→Middleman→Agent of exporter in San Vicente→Puerto Princesa→Manila→Japan and Taiwan.	December-May. Only 10-15 days per month.	7-200kg, USD2.30-3/kg
Bottom set gillnet (<i>Palubog</i>)	40% to owner, 60% to crew.	USD2130-3190	USD4 expenses for an overnight trip.	Small pelagic and demersal fish	Fisher→Middleman→Roxas, Taytay and/or Puerto Princesa. When dried, they will reach Manila.	No season	10-100kg, USD0.50-1.60/kg
Live fish (<i>Suno</i>)	50% to owner, 50% to crew.	USD1490-2130	USD64 expenses for a 3 day trip.	Leopard coral grouper (<i>Plectropomus leopardus</i>)	Fisher→Agent of exporter or local trader in San Vicente→Roxas→Manila→Hong Kong.	May-September	2-4kg, USD32-53/kg
Driftnet (<i>Palutang</i>)	50% to owner, 50% to crew.	USD4260	USD6.4 per trip for an overnight trip.	Small pelagic and demersal fish	Fisher→Middleman→Roxas, Taytay and/or Puerto Princesa. When dried, they will reach Manila.	October-January	20-300kg, USD0.5-1.60/kg
Ring net (<i>Talakop</i>)	50% to owner, 50% to crew. Crew have different shares depending on role. 25% of profit also to go to owner of Fish Aggregating Device (FAD) if FAD is used.	USD 21,280-42,530	USD28 per trip for a trip of several hours.	Small pelagic and demersal fish	Fisher→Middleman→Roxas, Taytay and/or Puerto Princesa. When dried, they will reach Manila.	No strict season, but better during May-September	200kg-2 tonnes, USD0.5-1.60/kg

⁶ Costs were converted from Philippine Pesos (PHP) to US Dollars (USD). At the time of the last period of fieldwork in November 2015, 1USD = 47PHP.

Table 1: Major fishing activities in San Vicente, Palawan province, Philippines.

277

278 **4.2 Fish trade and diversified livelihoods**

279 As with many other fishing communities in the Philippines, livelihoods in coastal San Vicente are
280 strongly diversified. Fishers engage in multiple types of fisheries trade and income generation, which
281 blurs locally the distinction between domestic and internationally traded fisheries. Products from
282 domestically traded fisheries are used as production inputs for internationally-traded fisheries, and
283 vice versa. Additionally, the seasonality of many fisheries means that fishers will undertake different
284 types of fishing activities over the course of a year. This means that from the perspective of
285 producers, the distinctions between different types of fisheries in terms of whether they are
286 internationally or domestically traded become less relevant. While fishers are usually well aware of
287 where the fish eventually get sold, the relevance of this point for their livelihood choices is limited.
288 Fishers may draw on very low fishing capital to produce for international markets, and the wealth on
289 higher capital assets to capture high volumes of fish for domestic markets.

290 The fisheries are sometimes physically linked, and fish from one fishery are often used as production
291 inputs in another fishery. For example, threadfin bream are caught with hook and line, dried and
292 sold to domestic markets in Manila. However, they are also used as bait for catching squid, which
293 are exported to international markets in Taiwan and Japan. Similarly, squid is used as bait for
294 threadfin bream. This means that fishers involved in one domestic fishery (threadfin bream) are
295 usually involved in another international fishery (squid). A typical fishing trip will involve fishing for
296 threadfin bream in the late afternoon, then squid fishing at night. A similar example is the
297 relationship between round scads, which are traded within Palawan and sometimes to Manila, and
298 leopard coral groupers, which are exported internationally to Hong Kong and mainland China. Round
299 scads are frequently used as fish feed for live groupers that are placed in grow-out cages. Hence,
300 fishers or traders who may specialise in live groupers will also engage in fishing for round scads.

301 Even more important than the physical interconnections between the fisheries are the ways in which
302 livelihoods are usually based around engagement with multiple fisheries because of seasonality. The
303 squid fishery lasts only from December to May, with peak catches occurring during March. Even
304 during this period, fishers are dependent on lunar cycles, fishing for 15 days per month, from the
305 end of the first quarter to the beginning of the fourth quarter. This means that households engaging
306 in the squid fishery only benefit from it during certain times of the year. Emma, for example, was a
307 fish trader in San Vicente who bought octopus, cuttlefish, squid, threadfin bream, and mixed reef
308 fish from one community and sold them to market traders or agents of Manila-based exporters in
309 Puerto Princesa. When asked about her preference for particular fish products, she noted: *'I have no*
310 *favourite product in particular because I need all of them at different times. I cannot afford just to*
311 *wait for the squid season. I have children going to school and college and they need support*
312 *throughout the year.'*

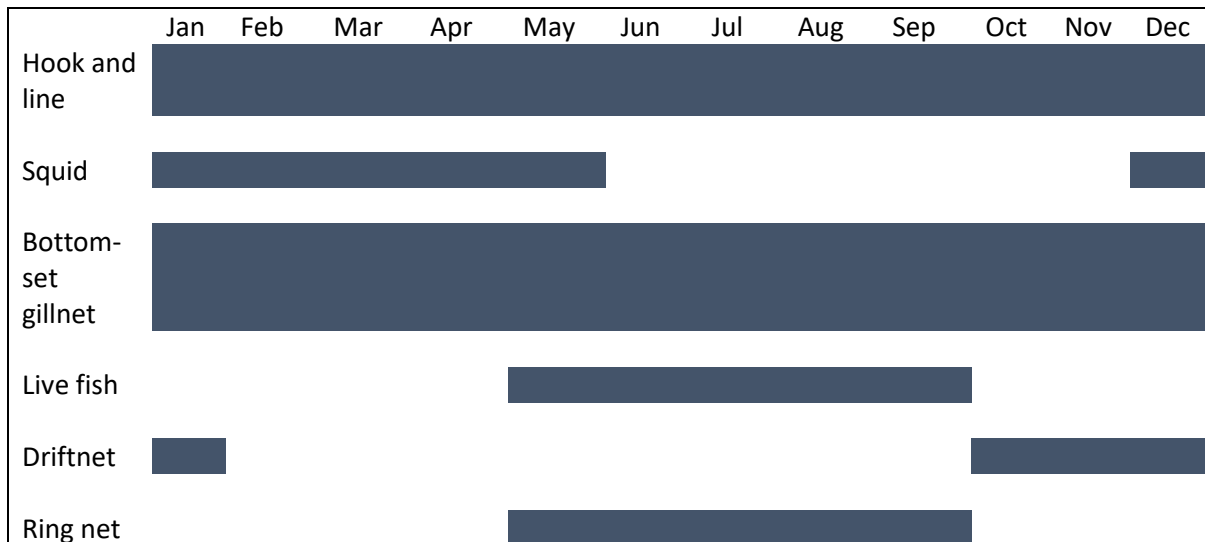
313 Similarly, the export live grouper fishery is also heavily seasonal. During the northeast monsoon
314 (*amihan*) from October to early May, conditions at sea make it difficult for fishers to travel far,
315 making it unprofitable to fish during this period. Instead, the best fishing time is during the
316 southwest monsoon (*habagat*), from late May to September. Recent attempts by the municipal and
317 provincial governments to introduce a closed season may also reduce the length of time during the
318 year when the live grouper fishery is active. During the time of year when it is not possible to fish for
319 grouper, fishing households will turn to a range of alternative fishery options among those outlined
320 in Table 1. Table 2 summarises the different fishery activities in San Vicente by season.

321

322

323

324



325

326 Table 2: Seasonality of major fishing activities in San Vicente, Palawan.

327 Source: Fieldwork 2014-2015.

328 The importance of seasonality and multiple livelihood options is illustrated by the example of José,
 329 who over the course of a year uses his fishing assets across multiple livelihood activities. He owns a
 330 boat with a 10 horsepower engine, and for most of the year uses this boat with a bottom-set gillnet
 331 (*palubog*). With this net he catches small fish such as mackerel, threadfin bream, and scads that are
 332 sold to a local middleman. The middleman then transports these fish to neighbouring municipalities
 333 and to Puerto Princesa. During the squid season he will use the same boat to focus on squid fishing,
 334 and he will also sometimes use his boat to catch live fish. However, he prefers net fishing as *'it is*
 335 *easier to come home each day. Fishing for live fish is dangerous as you have to go far out, and you*
 336 *have to spend three days away from home. Squid fishing is also good because it is inshore, but it only*
 337 *goes for a few months each year.'* During the farming season, José also works as a labourer on
 338 others' farms. Members of his household also opportunistically glean for shellfish and go
 339 spearfishing at night. This example is similar to that of many households, who will normally aim to
 340 diversify their sources of income.

341 In addition to working in multiple fisheries, households will typically engage in a range of other land-
342 based income-generating activities, including: managing a small general (*sari-sari*) store; raising a
343 small amount of livestock (e.g. chickens, pigs); wage labour for road construction; operating tricycle
344 or motorcycle transport services; obtaining remittances from relatives working in Manila or
345 overseas. Some may own small plots of land for farming (mostly paddy rice and some vegetables),
346 and in recent years, many poorer households also qualify for a government program of conditional
347 cash transfers. In many cases, such land-based livelihood activities may be linked with marine
348 activities – income from one may be used to support investments in the other. From a perspective
349 focused on a diversified livelihood, the distinctions between domestic and international fish trade
350 thus become blurred. Fisheries in San Vicente do not offer themselves as discrete, whole livelihood
351 options; instead they provide opportunities that producers engage in different ways and at different
352 times of the year, according to their own shifting and flexible livelihood priorities.

353 **4.3 Fisheries capitalisation, asset ownership and differentiation**

354 For local producers, the distinction between domestically and internationally traded fisheries is less
355 important than the level of ownership and assets within any particular fishery. Supported by local
356 profit sharing systems that heavily favour owners, those who own considerable fishing assets and
357 hence command the means of production obtain significantly more financial benefits than those
358 who do not own fishing assets. The fisheries that are most profitable are those with higher levels of
359 capitalisation. Such higher-capital and more profitable fisheries include a mixture of both domestic
360 and internationally-traded fisheries, leading those with assets and capital to invest in both.

361 As Table 1 shows, there are different systems for profit sharing in different types of fisheries. Such
362 profit sharing systems have many local variations, but are broadly related to other similar sharing
363 systems in the Philippines (e.g. Russell and Alexander 2000) and Southeast Asia (e.g. Firth 1966
364 [1944]; Russell and Poopetch 1998). One key element of these share systems is that as fisheries
365 become more capitalised, profit sharing systems alter in favour of boat owners. As Eder notes from

366 an earlier study of coastal San Vicente, 'the principle used in determining compensation is that
367 capital comes before labour. In the Philippines, capital commands a considerable share of the total
368 revenue' (2008: 71)⁷.

369 At the lowest level of capitalization is using hook and line or other simple gears on a boat without an
370 engine, or a very small engine. Each crewmember will keep their own catch, and one share will go to
371 the boat owner. In squid fishing, a slightly larger boat with a larger engine is used, and so when
372 expenses such as fuel are provided in addition to the boat and gear, greater shares begin to accrue
373 to the owner (1/3). Fishing using a bottom-set gillnet requires significant start-up costs, and so in this
374 fishery, 40% of the profits go to the owner. At a higher level of capitalisation is fishing for live fish,
375 which uses a similar type of boat as in squid fishing and bottom-set gillnets, but requires greater
376 expenses for an average trip of three days. In this fishery, 50% of the profits will go to the owner, as
377 they also do in the driftnet and ringnet fisheries. In the latter case of ringnet fishing, the crew will be
378 around 10-20 people, meaning that the owner's share will end up being significantly higher than that
379 of individual crewmembers. If the boat uses a ringnet to catch fish near a Fish Aggregating Device
380 (FAD) made of coconut fronds, bamboo and rope (*payaw*), 25% of the profits will also be required to
381 go the owner of the FAD. Thus, more capital-intensive fisheries generate a progressively greater
382 share of the profits to the owners of the capital. As the owner of the capital takes the greater
383 financial risk, larger capital outlays obtain a larger proportion of the returns.

384 Importantly, these capital-intensive fisheries are also the most profitable. Ring-net fishing trips may
385 catch between several hundred kilograms and 2-3 tonnes of small fish (for domestic markets) per
386 trip, and are by a considerable margin the most profitable type of fishing in terms of net profit (gross
387 revenue minus expenses). According to an earlier study of coastal fisheries in San Vicente by
388 Palawan State University (2011), vessels in the highly capitalised ringnet fishery have the highest

⁷ In practice, boat owners will usually have to satisfy crew demands for a minimal share before any profits are made, and fish will also be re-distributed through giveaways (see also Russell and Alexander 2000; Segi 2014).

389 catch per unit of effort by a considerable margin. This is partly simply because these vessels have
390 better physical access to the most productive fishing grounds further offshore. In the middle level of
391 capitalization, driftnet fishing trips will catch between 20-300kg of small fish, while bottom-set
392 gillnets will catch 10-100 kg per trip. While the fish that are targeted (for international markets) in
393 live fishing trips, leopard coral grouper, frequently attain beach prices of well over USD40 per kg,
394 usually only 2-3 pieces are caught over the course of a three day trip, meaning that they are not
395 necessarily particularly profitable. And while squid fishing (for international markets) is highly
396 profitable during the peak season, the time that is possible to fish for squid is so circumscribed by
397 seasonal and lunar variation that over the course of the year it is less significant than other fisheries.
398 The least profitable fishery is also the least capitalised: those boats using hook and line to target
399 small fish in inshore waters. There are no clear correlations between the capitalization and the
400 profitability of fisheries on the one hand, and the length of the commodity chain on the other, as
401 might have been expected: fisheries for international markets (squid and live fish) lie in the lower-to-
402 middle range of capitalization and profitability, whereas fisheries for domestic markets include
403 simple hook and line fisheries, middle-range net fisheries and highly capitalised ring-nets.

404 Instead of the length of the commodity chain, from the perspective of the livelihood of a fishing
405 household, a more pertinent distinction is the level of differentiation based on the possession of
406 fishing assets. Access to and use of the assets that underpin these various fishing activities depends
407 on a fisher household's suite of socio-economic characteristics, and the social relations they
408 negotiate in place. In particular, differentiation in San Vicente and the coastal Philippines is closely
409 linked with other social relationships and categories including ethnicity (Dressler 2009), status and
410 time of migration (Knudsen 2012) and gender (Eder 2006). Such differentiation is also frequently
411 closely linked to political power, whereby economic status is often correlated with social and
412 political status (c.f. Kerkvliet 1990: 61; Russell 1997). In many cases, however, access to the 'asset
413 base' often matters most to 'productive potential' and ensuing socio-economic differentiation.

414 While differentiation is by no means clear-cut, we divide groups of fishing households into three
415 general classes.

416 The poorest, lower income households are fishers with few or no capital assets. These fishers will
417 use hook and line or other simple gears on boats without engine, or will work as crew-members for
418 other boats with engines, but they also often produce for global markets. As a fisher from a nearby
419 coastal area of Palawan with similar economic conditions pointed out: *'Being a boat owner would be*
420 *much better; that is my goal one day. Then I could relax at home sometimes while others went out*
421 *and did the fishing for me! But now I have to fish for every single centavo I earn!'* (Fabinyi 2012: 71-
422 72). These fishers have few household assets and will live in basic, thatch huts with no electricity.
423 These fishers will often depend heavily on social networks for finding work, and crew on several
424 different boats for neighbours or kin. Dante, for example, was a married man in his early twenties
425 who alternated work among various fisheries depending on who was going fishing. Over the year, he
426 worked as a crew member on a boat owned by his cousin that used a bottom-set gillnet; occasionally
427 he worked on a boat for live fish owned by another neighbour, and during the squid season he
428 worked on several different boats.

429 Moderately poor, middle-income fisher households will own a somewhat larger boat with an engine:
430 using various types of gillnets for the capture of small fish, using squid jigs to capture squid, or hook
431 and line to capture live grouper. These households will often rent these boats out, and may
432 gradually capitalise their enterprise with new technology and boat crew. At this level of
433 capitalisation, how people choose which particular fishery to engage depends on a mixture of factors
434 include expertise, personal preferences and tolerance for risk. For example, fishing for live grouper is
435 usually conducted by younger fishers. These trips involve three days out at sea in difficult and
436 cramped conditions, which are physically challenging. If fishers catch several live groupers during a
437 trip this will be considered a 'jackpot', but it is not uncommon for fishers to catch no live groupers at
438 all and make a loss. In contrast, net fishing trips are preferred by those with lower tolerance for

439 physical and economic risk, as they involve fishing for shorter periods of time closer to shore and
440 tend to provide steadier, more consistent catches (c.f. Fabinyi 2012: 158-160).

441 Wealthier, upper income fisher households tend to own significant fishing related assets such as
442 several or many smaller boats, or a ring-net fishing vessel. Considerably more choice is involved in
443 livelihood activities, and these households can choose to invest heavily in one fishery, or multiple
444 fisheries, in trading, or even outside of the fishery sector – in farming, tourism or out-migration. Jojo,
445 for example, was an owner of two boats. He uses these boats to participate in four different
446 fisheries: live fish and squid for the smaller boat, and ring-net and driftnet for the larger boat. When
447 asked which of the four types of fishing he preferred the most and was the most important for him,
448 he replied that ‘they are all equally as good, as they operate best in different seasons’. He noted that
449 now and in the future, he had no wish to move into the trading and financing of other fishers, and
450 preferred to stay as a fishing operator: ‘it is difficult to sell your fish sometimes if you have too much
451 supply. It can also be a lot of work to manage your suppliers, it can be very risky. So I prefer to keep
452 the roles separate and just stay in fishing.’ His strategy was not to ‘upgrade’ along one commodity
453 chain, but to spread his assets across multiple commodity chains. Jojo’s experience again highlights
454 how households often seek to maintain a high level of diversification, and engage in multiple types
455 of fisheries trade. Others may be also involved in fish trading and financing the operations of other
456 fishers.

457 For Jojo and other fishing households, the type of fishing and the length of the commodity chain are
458 far less important than how many assets the household possesses, and how these assets are
459 deployed. These assets are frequently employed across a diversified portfolio: sometimes they may
460 be deployed in fisheries for domestic trade, at other times for international trade. Small boats with
461 an engine, for example, are used to capture either live fish or squid for international markets, or
462 small fish with nets for domestic markets. The key point, however, is that households are

463 differentiated in their ownership of fishing assets, and hence in their ability to obtain profits from
464 fisheries trade – whether domestic or international.

465

466 **5. CONCLUSION**

467 In this paper we have used the strong distinctions between domestic and international fish trade
468 prevalent in the literature as a starting point for our analysis of the empirical complexities of fish
469 trade. We acknowledge that the characteristics of international fish trade in other locations – where
470 products are exported to markets with stricter regulatory conditions than the East Asian markets for
471 squid and live reef fish of this case – may be quite different. Additionally, we recognise that from a
472 national perspective, there may indeed be many good reasons to devote greater policy attention to
473 domestic fish trade (HLPE 2014).

474 However, from a livelihood perspective that focuses on the perspectives and priorities of fishing
475 households, diversification across multiple fisheries tends to reduce the distinctions between
476 domestic and international fish trade. The emphasis on diversification among fishing households
477 means that all fisheries present a range of opportunities for fishers. Understanding how well fishers
478 can take up these opportunities depends instead on differentiation, based on the possession of
479 fishing assets. These assets are typically deployed across a range of different types of fisheries.

480 Our emphasis on diversification and differentiation means that the focus shifts from whether a
481 particular type of fishery is domestically or internationally oriented, and to how these types of fish
482 trade integrate with particular local contexts. Key are the linkages between fisheries trade and some
483 of the broader drivers of diversification and social differentiation that originate in the wider
484 economic, social and political context. In many fishing communities in developing countries the
485 ability to diversify and patterns of social differentiation are heavily influenced by issues such as
486 human rights concerns, institutional norms, and factors outside the fishery sector (Béné and Friend

487 2011; Jentoft and Eide 2011; Ratner et al. 2014; Jentoft and Chuenpagdee 2015). In the rural
488 Philippines, for example, social differentiation in fishing communities is strongly linked to issues such
489 as land use changes, labour relations in the agricultural and fisheries sectors, government policies on
490 poverty alleviation, local political dynamics, ethnic relations, and so on (Eder 2008; Fabinyi 2012;
491 Knudsen 2012). Focusing on the potential linkages of fisheries trade with these wider contextual
492 issues may help to understand where interventions designed to promote specific types of fish trade
493 may be more beneficial for poverty alleviation and/or food security: domestic fish trade,
494 international fish trade, or alternative policy interventions that are not focused on the commodity
495 chain length or even the fishing sector at all.

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