

much larger and cheaper. In my opinion, judging by results, the lake has been largely depleted, and the remedy to prevent it would be to increase the size of the mesh to 5in., and not to allow flounders to be taken under 10in. I think this should be the universal regulation. The urgency as regards Lake Ellesmere is because that lake has suffered, in my opinion, by excessive fishing. The fish are more easily taken in Lake Ellesmere than in the bays round the coast, and because it is a confined water, it is probably the best breeding-ground for fish. A weak point in the regulations is that, while the Collector of Customs is nominally charged with seeing the fishery regulations are being carried out, he has no time to attend to a duty of this kind; and what seems necessary is that an inspector should be appointed for this special duty, both in the interests of the public and of the honest fishermen. The undersized fish brought to market, as a rule, are immature fish, and the flesh is tasteless. I have seen them in the market as small as 7in. in length, whereas fully-grown flounders attain the length of 15in. or 16in. In my opinion, Lake Ellesmere, from its extent, and the absence of voracious fish that would devour the young flounders, is a most valuable breeding-ground, and the industry properly nursed would produce a very large supply of good fish-food for the public. I would like to refer the Commission to the report of the Fisheries Commission in London, that a well-preserved fishing-ground such as Lake Ellesmere is of more value as a food-supply for the public than an equal area of the best agricultural ground devoted to the production of beef or mutton.

*Thomas William Durant* (merchant, Leeston): I am well acquainted with the fishing industry at Lake Ellesmere. I am President of the Canterbury Fishermen's Union, registered under the Industrial Societies Act. The union comprises fishermen from Lake Ellesmere, Lyttelton, Akaroa, and Kaikoura. The object of the union is to improve the fishing industry of Canterbury, and particularly of Lake Ellesmere. The number of members is about a hundred and twenty, of which about forty are fishermen deriving their income and working at Lake Ellesmere. The number of boats used is twenty-one at the lake alone. Each boat has about twenty nets, of about 85 fathoms each. These nets are some of 4½in., some of 5in., and some of as much as 6in. We have also drag-nets of 4in., one to each boat, from 50 to 60 fathoms in length. For the carriage of the fish from the lake to Southbridge, Leeston, Lincoln, Greenpark, and Kaituna there is a horse and trap for each boat. The boats are from 14ft. to 24ft. long, and 5ft. to 6ft. beam, and most of them are half-decked, with centre board. We estimate that each boat takes an average of four cases per day throughout the year. A case averages about twelve dozen, and weighs about 56lb. The largest takes are from October to March. The flounders spawn in spring, August, September, and October, and are in best condition when they are spawning. There is no close season for them, and we take them all the year round. A carrier contracts with the union to bring the fish to Christchurch daily, where they arrive at half-past 7 a.m. They are then submitted to auction by an auctioneer employed by the union. The union rents the market, with conveniences. In summer months, when the flounders are plentiful, they average from 5s. to 10s. per case; and in winter from £1 to £1 15s. per case. They are sold direct at these prices to the fishmongers, hawkers, and dealers. The average size of flounders obtained is from 9in. (the limit) to 10½in. over all. At the present time in a case of flounders probably half would be not under 9in., and a half over that size—viz., varying from 10in. to 10½in., and a few over 10½in. In the winter a few cases of black flounders are caught; these would average 12in. to 15in. Before the last two years the lake was let out twice during the year, but the last two years only once a year. The most favourable time for the fishermen to have the lake let out is about May or June. Where the lake is let out is the best spawning-ground for the fish, and here the spawn and young fish can be seen in large numbers. If the lake is let out later than this the spawn and young fish are swept away with it, and there is a very great decrease noticed in the size and quantity of fish caught. This decrease was very noticeable some two or three years ago, when the lake was let out twice in the year. The lake was open then for three or four months each time, and flounders became very scarce. We reckon it takes from nine to ten months for a flounder to attain the size of 9in., and three months longer to attain the size of 10in. From the point of view of the fishermen flounders would be more plentiful if the lake was not let out at all, because directly the lake is let out the flounders go out to sea in large numbers. Just where the opening has been, after the lake is closed up, we get most fish. The fish are not graded according to size when put in the cases, but are put in indiscriminately. There is no inspection of fish at the lake by the Collector of Customs, or any Government official, or inspection of nets, but there is a heavy fine imposed by the union for the fishermen taking or selling or destroying undersized fish. The fishermen would be very much in favour of having such inspection, to prevent catching and selling fish under size, as this is done by some persons fishing on the edges of the lake in the shallow water, and the fish caught retailed throughout the country; and these are the individuals who take trout from the lake in large quantities, and sell them in the same way. These men use any kind of mesh they may happen to have. For set-nets, the best size, in our opinion, is 4½in., and these take flounders both of 9in. and above. A 4¼in. mesh would take few 9in. flounders, and a 5in. mesh scarcely any at all. There has been an increase in the number and size of flounders during the last two years, and, in our opinion, this arises from the lake not having been opened so often. By the regulations we are not allowed to use herring-nets. There is a very large quantity of herrings in the lake in the winter; twenty cases per day per boat have been caught. The herring-nets we want to use are of 2¼in.-mesh floating-nets, and these, as they float above the ground, would not interfere with the flounders or trout; and in so small a mesh neither flounders nor trout would become entangled. The average earnings per boat per week, taking all the year round, would be about £7 10s. This is divided into three shares—one share for the boat and gear, and one for each man. The fishermen desire to obtain permission to use the herring-nets. It would be an advantage to have every fisherman holding a license at a small fee, and we have suggested that to the Government already. The nets only last about six months, and cost £1 10s. If the Government make any regulations we think they ought to be universal, as otherwise our fish would be brought into competition with those brought from the seaboard. The Inspector of Weights and