

s proposed to keep it closed for the whole of the present season at all events. The Inspector reports that there is a good show of young oysters on the beds. The beds in the Tauranga fishery have also been closed for the present season, and in Manukau Harbour the leased areas have been declared open, but the other parts of the harbour have been closed. The Hauraki Gulf and Great Barrier Island beds, which have been closed for some time, have been opened, as the rest which they have had has enabled them to become replenished. Hokianga Harbour has been declared an open fishery, and Kaipara Harbour remains open. It was anticipated that the Whangarei beds, which have been closed for some time past, would be fit to be opened this season, but, as the Inspector's report shows that they have scarcely recovered from the depletion which took place when they were last open, it has been decided to allow them to remain closed for the present. The question of prohibiting the export of rock-oysters from the colony has been under consideration, representations having been made from Auckland that unless this is done there will soon not be sufficient procurable to meet the requirements of the colony. The artificial beds in the Pelorus Sound and Tory Channel have been inspected by the Collector of Customs at Blenheim, whose report is appended hereto. The report of the company which has the license for the artificial bed in Porirua Harbour states that there are now marketable oysters there. The following convictions were obtained during the year for illegally taking oysters: A. Leath, C. Leath, and R. Williams were fined £1 and costs; Rongo Hare and Kahu Hona Mirumi, 5s. and costs each for taking oysters without a license; J. Silva was fined £5 and costs for taking oysters in a closed fishery, and the yacht which he used for the purpose, which was forfeited, was restored to the owner on payment of a further sum of £10; W. Thompson was fined £5 and costs for taking oysters in a closed fishery, and his boat was sold; P. Garbes was fined £3 and costs for having frozen oysters in possession after the end of the open season. On the first day of the close season the Inspector visited the oyster-shops in Wellington and seized oysters in six of them; but as the quantity in each case was small, and as the season had only closed the day before, prosecutions were not instituted. On the last day of the recent close season G. Hanegan and T. Calvert were caught taking oysters in Drunken Bay, Auckland, and their boat, together with the oysters, were seized. The latter were sold, but the boat was restored to them on payment of £5.

The following licenses to occupy foreshore for the formation and cultivation of artificial beds were issued during the year: M. Banton, 4 acres in Purua Bay, Lyttelton Harbour, and E. O'Hara Canavan, 170 acres at Motueka. A list of the licenses to form artificial beds now in force is appended hereto.

*Sea-fisheries.*—When Captain Fairchild was in England in 1896 he was asked by persons interested in deep-sea trawling for information as to what probability there was of the industry being successfully established in this colony, and on his return he submitted the correspondence on the subject to the Government, who considered that the best way of encouraging the industry would be the granting of monetary assistance towards the cost of suitable vessels. A sum was accordingly placed on the estimates, and £4,000 was voted for the purpose, but as the Government promised the House that nothing should be done in the matter of making any grants out of the vote until the fishing-grounds had been tested by experimental trawling no engagements have been entered into. The prohibition of net-fishing in the Wanganui River above the Aramoho Railway-bridge having proved beneficial in providing an undisturbed breeding-ground for flounders, the prohibition has been extended for another year, and at the end of that time it will probably be made permanent. As trawling at the northern end of Wellington Harbour was injuring the flounder-breeding grounds the practice has been prohibited in that part of the harbour to the north-westward of a line drawn from the seaward end of the railway-wharf to the northernmost point of Somes Island, and thence to the northern end of Lowry Bay. The prohibition of the use of set nets for catching whitebait has been proved to be a hardship on persons fishing in the Ashley River, as, owing to the conformation and shallowness of the river, it was found impossible to catch the fish with the ordinary nets. To remedy this an Order in Council has been issued allowing the use of set nets with an opening of not more than 3 ft. by 1 ft. Information having been received that certain persons fishing in the Kakanui River were in the habit of destroying large quantities of small fish through drawing their nets on to the land before emptying them, the Collector of Customs at Oamaru, in company with a constable, made two special visits to the place, but without being able to detect any one committing the offence. There is reason to believe that the law requiring all nets to be emptied in the water is often disregarded, but it is very difficult to detect offenders. Small fish are sent up country and sold by fish-hawkers where there are no Inspectors to see that the law is not infringed.

The lessees of the Auckland Islands have asked that the prohibition against the taking of seals may be relaxed so far as regards sea-lions, on the ground that these seals now exist in large numbers and destroy the grass on the islands. This cannot, however, be done without an alteration of the law, unless an open season is made for all kinds of seals. On the "Hinemoa's" last visit to these islands the master was instructed to kill a few sea-lions and bring their skins and oil back with him in order that their commercial value might be ascertained. This was done, and the skins are now being tanned, and inquiries are being made as to the value of the oil.

The following persons have been appointed Fishery Inspectors during the year: Captain J. Neale, Sergeant Wild, and Constables Price and Egan.

The following convictions for offences against the Act have been obtained: For fishing in Lake Ellesmere with nets having a mesh smaller than the regulation size C. Golman was fined £2 and costs; J. Karrion, £2 and costs; A. Magaldo, £3 and costs; F. Thian, £1 10s. and costs; and R. Drew, £1 10s. and costs. The nets were forfeited. A. Vidal, of Palmerston North, was fined £1 and costs for being in possession of small fish. G. Heaton, of Sumner, was fined £1 and costs for using a net having a mesh smaller than allowed by the regulations. Ho Gee, of Greymouth, was fined £1 and costs for being in possession of a seal during the close season.