

quite misapprehend the effect of trawling on fish-life. As the unusual scarcity of fish experienced during the last winter and spring was felt quite as much in localities where no trawling was carried on as off Otago Heads, the reason for this exceptional scarcity must be looked for apart from trawling. Fishermen at Bluff, Moeraki, Oamaru, and Christchurch attribute the scarcity to the peculiar weather conditions experienced; and this, I think, would seem to be a reasonable explanation of the cause.

There is no doubt that trawling insures a more plentiful and regular supply of fish than it is possible to provide by any other method of fishing; therefore in order to develop the fisheries of the colony it is necessary that this and any other up-to-date system of fishing which may be introduced should be encouraged, and no restrictions imposed unless proof is forthcoming that injury is being done to the fisheries. I do not think that there is any necessity at the present time to fix an off-shore limit for trawlers off the coast of Otago, as asked for by fishermen at Port Chalmers. I would, however, again point out the necessity for regulating the size of the mesh of trawl-nets in order to minimise, as far as it is possible to do so, the destruction of immature fish by trawlers, and would ask that the recommendations made by me in this direction (*vide* my report dated the 9th April) should be given effect to. I would also recommend that a regulation should be made prohibiting trawlers from coming within half a cable's length of any boat which is first on and occupying any fishing-ground. I have had complaints from fishermen in different localities with regard to trawlers bearing down on them when they have been at work. Such a regulation as this would not impose the slightest hardship on trawlers, and it would tend to promote good feeling amongst men engaged in different systems of fishing.

I have, &c.,

L. F. AYSON,
Chief Inspector of Fisheries.

The Secretary, Marine Department, Wellington.

INQUIRY INTO FISHING,

HELD AT PORT CHALMERS AND DUNEDIN ON FRIDAY AND SATURDAY, 14TH AND 15TH NOVEMBER, 1902.

Mr. F. J. SULLIVAN, Owner of Two Trawlers working here, the S. Trawler "Napier" and the S.S. "Express."

I AM attending here in answer to the advertisement in the *Otago Daily Times*. I should like to be given an opportunity of refuting any arguments among the fishermen, and explaining anything that may be required to be explained, after you have heard all they have to say. I have brought the captain of the "Express" with me, who will also give you any information that you may require; but the other boat, the "Napier," is at present outside the Heads fishing, and her captain, or any of the crew, will be at liberty to answer any questions or give any information that you may require. I should also ask you, in the interests of the public, to interview some of the leading fishmongers of Dunedin, to verify any of the statements that I make, and satisfy yourself as to the statements made by the fishermen. I have been engaged in this industry here for the last twenty years, and therefore claim to have some knowledge of the local conditions. I understand that some fishermen at Port Chalmers claim that fish are extremely scarce this season close inshore and in the harbour because the trawlers are working here. Fish are very scarce this season throughout New Zealand where the trawlers are not working—for example, at the Bluff, Invercargill, Nuggets, Moeraki, Oamaru, Timaru, Christchurch, and Wellington—which, no doubt, in your official capacity, you are well aware of. All the people engaged in this industry at the various places will tell you that they never remember fish being so scarce. It has been impossible to buy whitebait at Christchurch at anything like a price this season, though formerly it was not the case. At Westport and Greymouth the firms there cannot get sufficient to make the business payable. Therefore I consider we must look for other reasons than trawling to explain the scarcity of fish. As a matter of fact my trawlers cannot get fish at present in less than 30 fathoms of water, and are working about eight miles off the land, which can be proved by the masters of my boats, and also by the independent evidence of the signal-master at Taiaroa Heads, who sees them daily. I understand that the small boats are never, or very seldom, near them. To my mind, fish are migratory, and, for reasons we cannot explain, have confined themselves to deep water this season; but at other times we may expect them close inshore, also in the harbour, where we have them in large schools. Therefore I consider it unreasonable to prevent trawlers from working inshore when the fish are there and there are none in deep water. Recently the line-men would have been unable to catch fish at all if it had not been for the assistance given them by the trawlers in giving them bait free by my instructions. After getting the bait they were able to catch fish. The Government has spent a considerable amount in prospecting our trawling-grounds, and I and others have invested a considerable sum in the interests of the trawlers here and elsewhere, under the impression that the laws would be allowed to remain as they are. It would be a considerable hardship to find that we could not fish here or there at the dictation of discontented fishermen, who are under a wrong impression as to the principal reasons why fish are so scarce in the harbour and close inshore this season. There are at present fourteen men employed on my trawlers, and they are paid wages at a higher rate than is paid by the Union Company. More trawlers would mean more employment, and I have been giving the Port Chalmers fishermen the privilege of employment. The public have also to be considered, and it is said that for the past three months Oamaru, Timaru, and Christchurch have had to depend on the supplies from the trawlers, as there