

A REPORT ON NEW ZEALAND'S FISHERIES.—THEIR PRESENT CONDITION AND FUTURE DEVELOPMENT.

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INTRODUCTION.

In islands such as those which comprise this Dominion, situated as they are between the 34th and 47th parallels of latitudes south, and washed by sub-equatorial and sub-antarctic currents, the conditions surrounding the fisheries must be very various, and these conditions can only be determined by careful and systematic study.

In her fisheries (both sea and fresh water) New Zealand possesses a most valuable asset, as her natural advantages in this connection are undoubtedly superior to any other country in the Southern Hemisphere.

With its great extent of coast-line, splendid harbours, and numerous sheltered bays, and with an abundance and splendid variety of edible fishes, this Dominion must in time become a great fishing-centre in the South Pacific, providing for its people a regular and abundant supply of this necessary food, and, besides, developing a large export trade in fresh, cured, and canned fish and oysters to Australia, the South Sea colonies, and other countries.

In all countries which possess large supplies of food fishes the harvest of the sea is recognized as a great and extremely reproductive one for the employment of labour and capital, and there is no doubt that when the fishing industry of this Dominion is placed on a proper footing capital will be readily invested, and that it will at once become one of the important and profitable sources for the employment of labour. The value and importance of New Zealand's fisheries at the present time are as nothing compared with the possibilities which the future holds.

ADMINISTRATION AND PRESENT CONDITION OF THE FISHERIES.

Administration.—The fisheries at the present time are administered by and as part of the Marine Department. The fisheries staff consists of a Chief Inspector, who has the general supervision of all the fisheries, and acts as adviser to the Department on fishing matters; an Assistant Inspector at Bay of Islands, Auckland, Dunedin, Invercargill, and Bluff. All Collectors of Customs are also Inspectors under the Sea Fisheries Act, and a number of Police officers are appointed Inspectors where it is considered necessary, and paid a small salary for their services.

Condition of the Fisheries, &c.—The number of vessels licensed to fish in 1912 was 1,179, and the number of men employed in connection with the industry was approximately 1,500.

As no proper system of collecting fishery statistics has yet been adopted, the total quantity of fish brought in and marketed during the year cannot be given.

The value of the fish, oysters, and fish products exported in 1912 was as follows:—

						£	s.	d.
Fish of all kinds	..	..	..	..	..	33,746	0	0
Oysters	..	..	..	..	..	2,984	0	0
Whalebone	..	..	..	..	..	3,196	0	0
Whale-oil	..	..	..	..	..	2,052	0	0
Fish—cured, canned, or otherwise preserved	..	..	..	..	..	13,485	0	0
Total value	..	..	..	..	..	55,463	0	0

The total value of dried, salted, and cured fish imported in 1912 was £108,105.

FISHING-VESSELS.

The introduction of the motor-launch has been of immense assistance to fishermen, and at the present time there is scarcely a sailing-vessel in use anywhere; and every year there is an improvement in the class of vessels built, as it is found that the man who can afford to build and use the large and more powerful boats has a decided advantage over the smaller vessels, as he can go farther afield when necessary, and also make more regular and quicker trips to and from the fishing-grounds. The high price of benzene at the present time comes hard on the fisherman, as it considerably reduces his actual earnings, and also prevents him from taking the risk of prospecting for new grounds.

SYSTEMS OF FISHING.

The principal methods of capturing fish for market up to the present have been by means of hook and hand-line, seine and set nets, and trawling. Fishermen are, however, commencing to realize the necessity of adopting more up-to-date methods. In this connection it may be mentioned that (in the Hauraki Gulf and Cook Strait a number of the fishermen have adopted a system of long-lining, which is proving very successful, and a great improvement on the single hand-line. Trawling with oil-launches is now quite common on a good many of the grounds. It was first tried in Cloudy Bay, Cook Strait, and, proving successful, fishermen in other places took it up. At Timaru, at the present time, there are eight launches fishing in this way, and with very good results. There is little doubt that in a short time long-line fishing will be in general use throughout the Dominion, and we hope to see other methods of taking the pelagic forms of marketable fish-life adopted, such as drift nets and purse seine nets.