

Further, in addition to a number of reports and other matters brought to its attention the Commission had before it the interesting report of Professor Prince on the fishing industry in New Zealand, reports made at various times by the Chief Inspector of Fisheries, and a copy of the evidence given at Dunedin before the Industries Committee of the House of Representatives by the Hon. G. M. Thomson, M.L.C., which Mr. Thomson very kindly forwarded at the request of the Chairman of the Commission; and finally the Commission had the advantage of the evidence of Mr. Ayson, Chief Inspector of Fisheries, given after he had heard the whole of the evidence adduced by the various parties represented.

TRAWLING RESTRICTIONS.

It will be convenient to deal with this matter first. On this subject the evidence disclosed great diversity of opinion. At the present time trawling is prohibited in the Hauraki Gulf inside a line starting at Matakana and extending from there to the southernmost point of Tiritiri, and from that point to Cabbage Bay. In the opinion of a large number of witnesses this line should be placed much farther out, so that the area within which trawling is prohibited would be greatly extended. On the other hand, a large number of witnesses were of opinion that no injury would result, but on the contrary great benefits to the fishing industry would accrue, if trawling were permitted much farther into the gulf than at present. In considering this question the following points have been taken into consideration:—

- (1.) The preservation of fish from unnecessary destruction or disturbance;
- (2.) (a.) The need of allowing trawling in grounds sheltered as far as possible from the prevailing winds;
 (b.) In fixing a line, the making use as far as possible of prominent headlands, or other natural features, which could fairly easily be picked up by the trawling-masters;
- (3.) The protection of certain areas from trawling in the interests of the line and net fishermen; and
- (4.) To some extent, the protection of areas from trawling in the interests of sport, and of fishing by members of the public.

With respect to the preservation of fish, there was a great conflict of evidence and diversity of opinion as to the extent to which the Hauraki Gulf is a spawning and breeding ground for fish. But whether or not such fish as snapper spawn in the gulf, the great weight of evidence shows that the smaller fish inhabit the shallower waters of the protected bays and inlets, and there grow while more or less protected from part of their natural enemies. The evidence goes this length: that though large—and even very large—fish may be caught in these shallower waters in the bays and inlets and in the waters in their vicinity, a great proportion of the fish are small. On this ground it is the opinion of many witnesses that trawling should not be permitted anywhere near bays such as Cabbage Bay, Whangaparaoa Bay, and the sheltered waters between Kawau and the mainland, and that the only satisfactory way of attaining this would be to fix a line very much farther out than the present line, it being suggested that the line should extend from Bream Head to Cape Colville.

As against this it is pointed out by the trawling-masters that such a line would leave them no trawling-ground protected from easterly and northerly winds, and that consequently there would be fairly often recurring periods when they would be unable to catch fish. Great weight, in our opinion, must be given to the question of shelter. The evidence shows that the price of fish in Auckland is very much lower than the prices in the other four centres, and undoubtedly the greatest factor in bringing about that result is that in the Hauraki Gulf we have not only excellent fishing-grounds, but also grounds some of which will be protected from practically whatever wind may at the time be blowing. The effect is that though there may be considerable variations in the supply of fish, there is seldom, if ever, a dearth of fish such as may be produced in other parts of the Dominion by continuous bad weather; and no factor is more important in keeping down prices than a fairly continuous supply. The Commission was informed that with the line, where it is now, the average time lost by a trawler owing to bad weather is about one day in a fortnight. It was suggested that if larger and more powerful trawlers were used the difficulty of protection would be got over; but it seems fairly clear that this would not be so—that no matter how powerful the trawler, trawling would not be practicable while the vessels were exposed to very heavy weather.

On the other hand, the Commission was asked by those interested in the trawling industry—and the application was supported by a considerable weight of evidence—to recommend that trawling should be permitted in the gulf up to a line from Whangaparaoa Point to Thumb Point on Waiheke Island, and thence to the sandspit, and thence to Deadman's Point. When the members of the Commission were on the trawler three "shots" were made, each with the trawl down for one and a half hours. One "shot" was made just outside the present line, terminating four or five miles off Cabbage Bay, and two "shots" were made inside the present limits. It was a noticeable feature of the fish obtained from each of these three trawls that the great bulk of them, though of good marketable size, were not large. This may have been more or less accidental, due to special conditions, but it lends weight to the considerable body of evidence brought before the Commission that the farther into the gulf a trawler works the greater the proportion of small fish taken.

The evidence shows fairly conclusively that fish cannot now be caught in the gulf by the line and net fishermen with the same ease with which they were caught many years ago; but the evidence also shows that this greater difficulty in catching the fish was noticeable even before the advent of the trawler, and the evidence that the trawlers have had any great part in producing this state of affairs is far from conclusive. Undoubtedly, however, the trawlers have had some part in bringing it about, and if in trawling well up into the gulf the greater part of their catches consists of moderate-