

PRICE OF FISH IN AUCKLAND.

The evidence discloses the fact that Auckland is in a very favourable position in regard to the price of fish as compared with the other centres of the Dominion. This is due not only to the fact that there is a very large supply of fish in the Auckland waters, but also, and probably in a greater degree, to the fact that waters protected from any given wind can be found in the district. There is no doubt, too, that the industry in Auckland is well organized: and the evidence as to the expense of dealing with fish, and as to the price charged to the public, leaves the impression that the people of Auckland have, in present circumstances, no grounds of complaint on the question of price.

We are of opinion, however, that there is still ample room for reduction in the price of fish in Auckland, and we hope that when the cost of the materials used in the industry again comes back to the normal level, and effect is given to our recommendations, fish will be supplied to the public in Auckland at a lower price than at present.

This question of the cost of fish leads to several other recommendations which are outside the order of reference, but which we respectfully beg leave to submit.

CHILLING AND ICEMAKING PLANTS.

We are of opinion that the provision of chilling plants and icemaking machinery in suitable places would lead not only to the lowering of the price of fish, but also to the encouragement of the industry generally. There is an outstanding need for an icemaking plant and cool storage for fish at Helensville. At Auckland the Municipal Fish-market and Sanford Limited have icemaking machinery, freezing plants, and cold storage of considerable capacity, and there is other cold storage in the city available. At the Thames the Thames Fisheries (Limited) now has a freezing plant and considerable cold storage, and this company is very greatly enlarging its works, so as to put itself in a position in which it hopes to be able to deal with 100 tons of fish weekly. At Helensville there are a considerable number of line and net fishermen, but there is constant complaint, both from them and from the Auckland dealers, that the provision for conveying their fish to the Auckland market is utterly inadequate. At first view it would appear that a great part of the trouble lay with the Railway Department, but that in fact is not the source of the difficulty. Complaints were made by the fishermen that the cost to them of carriage of their fish to Auckland is very heavy, and that the fish often arrive in Auckland not in good condition. The Railway Department is put to considerable difficulty in dealing with the carriage of fish under present circumstances. Fishermen arrive with their catches at varying times and send them to Auckland by the next train. This leads to the Railway Department having to make provision for carrying continual dribbles of fish, the consignors have to pay at high rates notwithstanding that the Department's charges appear to be reasonable, and it is impossible to make such satisfactory provision for the carriage of fish as would be the case if a large consignment were sent down regularly by one train daily.

All these difficulties arise from the fact that there is no provision at Helensville for the storage of fish, and the fish intended for the Auckland market is stored on its arrival in Helensville merely by placing it in a truck to be sent with the next train. If cold storage, and also an icemaking plant, were available in Helensville all these difficulties would be overcome, and the fishermen would be very greatly assisted in their work of catching fish. It was disclosed by the evidence before the Commission that the most satisfactory way of carrying fish, and the most satisfactory way of keeping fish for a few days, is to pack them in ice. If there were at Helensville an icemaking plant and proper cool storage for fish the fishermen would be able to take ice in their boats in which to pack the fish when they were fishing at considerable distances, and by this means the fish would reach Helensville in thoroughly good condition. The cool storage would enable the fish to be collected as each fisherman came in with his boat-load, and they could be kept and the whole day's supply of fish could be packed in ice and sent down to the city by one particular train in the day. This would enable the Railway Department to make much more satisfactory arrangements for the carriage of fish, and also for its delivery on arrival, and packing in ice would lead to its arrival in good condition. The Kaipara, apparently, is the part of the Auckland Fishery District which is most liable to fluctuations in the supply of fish. The evidence shows that at times the fishermen there are able to make very large catches, but the difficulties already mentioned have led to these fishermen particularly having limits imposed upon their catches, and also to considerable loss in the fish on their way to the market.

The provision of this plant, which in our opinion is so extremely necessary, is a difficulty. The fishermen in the Kaipara are not themselves in a sufficiently strong position to erect such a plant; it would probably be outside the scope of the undertaking of the Auckland City Council to expend its funds upon the erection of such a plant; and in the peculiar circumstances of the position it would probably not pay Sanford Limited to do so notwithstanding that it would be to the advantage of all these parties that such a plant should be provided. It would probably not pay Sanford Limited to erect a plant at Helensville unless it had the effect of giving the company the control of the industry there, and this would not be in the interests of the public. There seems to be no way out of these difficulties except for the Government to erect such a plant, and this we beg most earnestly to recommend.

The Chief Inspector of Fisheries, in addition to recommending the erection of a plant at Helensville by the Government, strongly advocated the installation of similar plants at Whangaruru and the Mercury Islands. Inspector Flinn, of the North Auckland Fisheries District, stated that in his opinion very great advantage would accrue from the erection of a plant at Whangaruru. He stated that there were a large number of fishermen in and about Russell, that immense quantities of fish were to be caught in those waters, and that the encouragement to the industry which would be given