

The CHIEF INSPECTOR OF FISHERIES to the SECRETARY, MARINE DEPARTMENT.

SIR,—

Marine Department, Wellington, 19th June, 1920.

I have the honour to present the following report on the fisheries for the year ended 31st March, 1920 :—

During the year I visited the following fishing-grounds and fishing-ports, viz.: Bay of Islands, Kaipara, Whangarei, Hauraki Gulf, Great Barrier, Hawke's Bay, Cook Strait, Picton, Hokitika, Lyttelton, Kaiapoi, Lake Ellesmere, Timaru, Oamaru, Port Chalmers, Invercargill, Bluff, and Stewart Island. I also made special inspections of the oyster-beds at Bay of Islands, Mangonui, Whangarei, Great Barrier, and Hauraki Gulf; and also of the toheroa-beds along the coast north of Kaipara, the beds on the Ninety-mile Beach from Ahipara to Scott's Point, and on the beach from the Otaki River to north of the Horowhenua Lake.

During the year I visited New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria, and Tasmania for the purpose of getting first-hand information and a practical insight into the methods of artificial oyster-culture and State fishing and marketing by the State Governments in New South Wales and Queensland, and also the methods of packing and transport of fish from the fishing-grounds to market, and of forwarding to inland towns in all the States which I visited. A full report of my inspection and observations of the fisheries of the States which I visited has already been supplied to you.

From the reports and returns received from the Collectors of Customs and Inspectors of Fisheries at the various fishing-ports it would seem that there has been a considerable increase in the quantity and value of fish marketed in comparison with the previous year. Fishermen on the east coast as far north as East Cape lost a good deal of time on account of stormy weather, which affected their earnings to a considerable extent and kept the city markets specially short of fish for weeks at a time. Even with the higher prices charged the demand for fish is steadily on the increase, and the Government must face the question of taking such steps as will ensure a substantial increase in the fish-supply all over the Dominion. The continued short supply and high price of coal, benzine, nets, and netting-twine, &c., is undoubtedly adversely affecting the fish-supply; but even under normal conditions the catching-power is at present not sufficient to supply the increasing demand for fish, and an increase in the number and also in the size of all new fishing-vessels is necessary, with better facilities for marketing and distributing fish, in order to satisfactorily increase the supply of fish for the people of the Dominion. If private enterprise cannot provide the increased supply which is required, then the Government will have to consider the question of putting on a number of up-to-date fishing-vessels, capable of working any part of our coasts and in any depths where fish are most plentiful.

Rock-oysters.—The picking and sale of these oysters by the Department was continued last season. The picking commenced as usual on the 1st May, but, on account of the pickers employed on the Hauraki Gulf beds ceasing work when they were put on to pick the beds on Rangitoto Island, the season had to be closed at the end of July. The quantity of oysters picked during the three months for which the season was open was 7,256 sacks; of this number, 4,243 came from the Bay of Islands, 2,473 from the beds in the Hauraki Gulf, and 540 from the Great Barrier. The total quantity received at the oyster-depot at Auckland was 6,894 sacks, and 363 were sold locally at Russell. Of the quantity received at the depot, 5,896 sacks were sold in Auckland and 998 sacks were forwarded to other places. Of the quantity disposed of in Auckland, 1,560 sacks were sold at the depot in small parcels containing $4\frac{1}{2}$ dozen each, at 1s. a parcel, and from 16 to 18 dozen each, at 3s. 6d. a parcel. These retail parcels realized £244 16s. 6d. more than would have been obtained had the oysters been sold by the full sack. This shows that the retail business, which enables people to go to the depot to get small quantities of oysters, is becoming more popular every year.

The work of replanting depleted areas and shifting oyster-rock from near high water down to and below half-tide was continued during the year at the Bay of Islands, and the beds there have been considerably extended by the work which has been done in this way during the last three years. The yearly increasing demand for oysters, however, makes it imperative that a comprehensive scheme of artificial oyster-culture should be taken in hand. There is no doubt that there are large areas in the north where extensive beds can be formed by adopting some of the Australian methods of oyster-culture best suited for the conditions in our bays and estuaries. Valuable work has been done since 1909 in the Hauraki Gulf and Bay of Islands by planting depleted areas with oyster-rock taken from other beds, and by shifting high-water oyster-rocks down to and below half-tide, but there is a limit to the work which can be done in this way, and the time has come when more scientific methods must be adopted for the purpose of extending the beds and increasing the oyster-supply. Our northern rock-oyster (*Ostrea cucullata*) is identical with the oyster which is so extensively cultivated in New South Wales and Queensland. It is really a subtropical species, the northern part of New Zealand being the southern limit of this oyster in this hemisphere, and our colder water and climate no doubt account for the poorer and rather uncertain seasonal fixing of oyster-spat on our New Zealand beds in comparison with the abundant and regular fixing which they get in the warmer waters and climate of New South Wales and Queensland. The poorer fixing of spat on our beds in turn influences the quantity of mature oysters which can with safety be taken for market each season.

Foveaux Strait Oyster-beds.—The quantity of oysters dredged from these beds last season was 21,394 sacks, containing approximately 1,283,640 dozen, valued at £13,371, of which 20,804 sacks, valued at £12,954, were sold in the Dominion, and 590 sacks, valued at £417, were exported to Melbourne. The oysters throughout the season were in first-rate condition, and the men employed dredging report that a good supply was obtainable from the beds which were worked.