

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

SIR,—

Marine Department, Wellington, 29th July, 1921.

I have the honour to present the following report on the fisheries of the Dominion for the year ended 31st March, 1921:—

The following fishing-ports and fishing-grounds were visited by me during the year, viz.: Whangaroa, Bay of Islands, Whangarei, Kaipara, Hauraki Gulf, Great Barrier, Bay of Plenty, Hawke's Bay, Cook Strait, Marlborough Sounds, Picton, Kaikoura, Kaiapoi, Lyttelton, Timaru, Oamaru, Moeraki, Port Chalmers, Invercargill, and Bluff.

I inspected the oyster-beds at Whangaroa and Kaipara once, and the oyster-beds at Bay of Islands, Whangarei, Great Barrier, and Hauraki Gulf twice during the year, and supervised the oyster-cultivation work at the commencement of the work on the Coromandel coast. I also made three visits to the salmon-hatchery at Hakataramea, and supervised and assisted in repairs to the Department's temporary hatchery at Pembroke.

The reports received from the Collectors of Customs and Inspectors of Fisheries show that, in comparison to the previous year, there has been a substantial increase in the quantity and value of fish landed during the year. The weather conditions have been favourable, particularly during the summer months, for fishing, and on most of the fishing-grounds fish have been plentiful. In the Auckland District large catches of snapper, mullet, tarakihi, and flounder have been made. In Hawke's Bay very good catches were made by trawlers throughout the year, flat fish being particularly plentiful from October to March; and the reports with regard to the fishing-grounds in the Wellington, Marlborough Sounds, Kaikoura, Canterbury, and Otago Districts are equally favourable. The high price of benzine, nets, and all other fishing-gear comes hard on fishermen, for, although they are now getting a somewhat higher price for their fish, yet this increase, they claim, is not in proportion to the increase in their working-expenses. This in turn influences the quantity of fish marketed, as fishermen will go out only when the conditions are favourable for making payable catches.

Fishermen report that the largest shoals of pilchard which have been seen on the east coast for a good many years made their appearance in February last. They were reported as having been seen at different parts along the coast from Cook Strait to Oamaru.

The total quantity of fish brought in from the fishing-grounds during the year was about 241,072 cwt.; its wholesale value, including crayfish and whitebait, was about £344,333 11s. The total quantity of oysters taken off the beds, including Foveaux Strait and the northern rock-oysters, last season was 33,218 sacks, the wholesale value of which was £22,657. The quantity and value of whale-oil and other products from the whaling-stations was 478 tons oil, 80 tons bonedust, and 100 gallons spermaceti, valued at £19,307: the total value for the year being about £386,297 11s.

ROCK-OYSTERS.

Owing to the difficulty in getting oyster-pickers for the Hauraki Gulf beds the sale of oysters did not commence until the 1st June, 1920, and on account of a shortage of pickers later on the season closed on the 14th October. The total quantity picked during this short season was 6,797 sacks, representing a value of £5,968 9s. The beds picked were those at Bay of Islands, Kaipara, Port Fitzroy, and part of the beds in the Hauraki Gulf.

The demand for oysters throughout the season was very great, and the supply coming forward was never equal to market requirements.

For the purpose of extending the beds oyster-cultivation work on a more extensive scale than in any previous season was carried out during the months of January, February, and March. The method which I have recommended the Department to adopt is the building of hollow rock walls in well-sheltered and otherwise suitable bays. These walls are built principally of clean rock obtained at and above high-water mark, and they extend from near the top of the oyster-line down to low water. This method is the most economical, besides being permanent. Last summer six men were employed on this work at Bay of Islands and Whangarei, four at Tekumu Bay, Coromandel coast, and four at Port Fitzroy. At Bay of Islands 3,606 yards of walls were built, 394 at Whangarei, 733 at Coromandel, and 566 at Port Fitzroy—making a total of 5,299 yards, or rather more than three miles.

There is a yearly shrinkage, from several causes, in the extent of our natural rock-oyster beds, and the continual increase in the number of people who frequent the shores of the Hauraki Gulf and Bay of Islands causes a considerable yearly shrinkage in the quantity of oysters which can be taken from the beds for market. At no time during the last twenty years has the supply of oysters been sufficient for market requirements, and on account of the increase in population of late years it is safe to say that the market at the present time could absorb three times the quantity which can be obtained from the present beds. The necessity for extending the beds by artificial methods is thus apparent. Inspectors Bennett and Flinn and assistants have carried out their duties, both with regard to the protection of the beds and supervising the oyster-cultivation work, in a most satisfactory manner.

FOVEAUX STRAIT OYSTER-BEDS.

The Inspector at Bluff reports that during the past season the oysters were plentiful on the beds and in excellent condition. The quantity dredged from the beds last season was 26,703 sacks, valued at £16,689. The quantity sold in the Dominion was 24,848 sacks, valued at £15,470, and the quantity exported to Melbourne was 1,855 sacks, valued at £1,219. I have not been able to get out on to these beds for a considerable time, but will endeavour to make an inspection of several of the beds before this dredging season closes.