

Whether one accepts the view that our fisheries are capable of considerably increased exploitation or—which I fear is much nearer the truth—that their potentialities are comparatively limited and permanent damage by depletion a possibility against which all precautions should be taken, the importance of a statistical study of conditions must in either case be recognized.

With these apologies for the limitations of the statistical part of this report and adumbration of improvements for the future, I pass on to deal with the main features of the history of the fishery conditions for the year.

Some improvement on the previous year's production appears to be shown for the fisheries of the Dominion as a whole. Too much significance cannot be attached to the figures in Table II for reasons already touched upon, but it may be said that in most cases these are borne out by general knowledge of the local conditions. The landings for Auckland (for which port our data may be taken as very closely approximating to accuracy) show an appreciable rise compared with the previous year which, in view of the increased restrictions placed upon trawling and Danish seining, is a matter for satisfaction. There is still, however, a decline as compared with the production for 1927–28. Fewer snapper were caught during the schooling season, owing partly to the boisterous weather of this summer and partly to the abnormal distribution of the shoals, which was doubtless an effect of the abnormal climatic conditions. The Danish seining vessels with the greatest range and best capacity for working in bad weather brought in the most consistently good catches throughout the year. Steam trawlers, being less affected by adverse weather, were the most regular in their supplies. They divided their operations between the grounds in the Bay of Plenty, off the west coast, and in the outer part of the Hauraki Gulf. At no time were unusually big catches made by the trawlers, and it would appear that they had as much as they could do to keep their market supplied. It seems clear, therefore, that restrictions on this method of fishing have gone as far as is consistent with operating on a profitable scale under existing methods.

Snapper supplies were generally satisfactory, except when weather prevented the boats from getting to the grounds.

A particularly good flat-fish season was experienced in the spring months by Danish seiners working mainly on the "Dab Patch" (between Ponui and Deadman Point). Rough weather was the only deterrent to good fishing, but the spring gales were less in evidence than usual. This fishery is prosecuted at the expense of spawning aggregations of flounders and dabs, and therefore requires careful watching both from the economic and the biological aspect.

The landings of fish at Thames have undergone a welcome improvement after the depression of the previous year. This has been effected very largely by the change of attitude which has at last been shown towards the use of the Danish seine. Men who had opposed this method of fishing from its inception have now recognized that the old-established method of fishing with set-nets is less satisfactory for providing a fairly continuous supply of fish and they have changed over to Danish seining and to making longer voyages. By this means, and by a greater attention to long lining on the outer grounds when the seasonal conditions call for it, the fish supplies to Thames have been made to show a much desired improvement.

The fish distributors of Thames continue to obtain supplies of fish (especially snapper) overland from Mercury Bay. The fact indicates progress and development, but it may be observed that the conditions under which some of the fish is conveyed by motor-lorry are by no means calculated to bring to the consumer an article of first quality. It is to be hoped that the trade will soon be developed to such dimensions that a modern method of handling the fish and storing it for transport may be adopted. Both fishermen and distributors would be the gainers thereby.

The considerable increase shown in the landings of fish at Wellington is to be attributed partly to the fact that two large steam-trawlers now regularly work from the port. But it is also due to the fact that data have been collected from a larger number of sources. The local Inspector reports that the fishing on the whole has been below average owing to the prevalence of north-westerly gales. Wellington fish-supplies are obtained from steam-trawler catches, from the Island Bay fleet of long-liners, and from various net and line fishermen in the vicinity of Wellington who send supplies to the market by rail or by steamer. A great deal of fish goes direct from producer to retailer and some proportion is sent up country. Returns of a statistical kind are thus very difficult to collect and classify in the absence of a standardized system.

The operations of the Napier trawling fleet in Hawke's Bay, favoured by an absence of bad weather, were on the whole attended by satisfactory results. From October to March flat fish were reported to be more plentiful than in any year since 1921–22. With increased attention being paid to flat fish on the inshore grounds, the landings of round fish showed a decided falling off.

The southern fisheries have shown a marked deterioration this year. With regard to the Otago ports line-fishing for groper has been especially disappointing, more particularly on the nearer grounds. This has stimulated several fishermen to adopt the long-line method of fishing and to proceed farther afield, but it has also resulted in others seeking different employment for a time. Trawlers have done somewhat better, good catches of flat fish being made in fine weather, but fair or poor fishing was the usual rule. One owner tried Danish seining unsuccessfully. Inshore fishing with seines has been less successful than usual.

The sardine-fisheries of the Hauraki Gulf noticed in last year's report are still in the tentative stage, and so far as is known there are no noteworthy developments to report.

ROCK-OYSTERS.

Picking for the 1929 season began on the 27th June, and closed on the 11th October. The number of sacks of oysters taken from the beds in the different areas was as follows: Bay of Islands, 2,651 (including 21 from Whangaruru); Whangarei, 309; Kaipara, 818; Hauraki Gulf, 2,009 (Takatu