The returns for the neighbouring port of Thames also indicate a slight increase. For the last six years the returns for total quantity and value and for the two principal kinds of marketable fish have been as follows:—

	1930–31.	1931–32.	1932–33.	1933–34.	1934–35.	1935–36.
	Cwt.	Cwt.	Cwt.	Cwt.	Cwt.	Cwt.
Total wet fish	26,991	21,291	18,078	17,412	17,614	19,134
Snapper	10,811	10,257	9,750	10,429	11,163	14,053
Flounder (including dabs)	6,899	7,228	6,516	4,869	4,769	3,305
Total value	£30,247	£21,116	£14,029	£13,595	£13,957	£14,593

The general trend is decidedly downward over the last six years, more especially in regard to flounders. Snapper landings show an increase, but this is a less valuable fish than flounder. The value of the total landings of fish at Thames has declined to less than half what it was in 1930–31. This decline is ascribed to the deterioration of the flounder fisheries which have always been of primary importance to this port. While at certain times bad weather and the abundance of jelly-fish have hindered the operations of the Thames set-net fishermen, and while their earnings have been depressed by the low market prices for both flounders and snapper, it is considered locally, and apparently with a good deal of justification, that the decline of the Thames fishing industry is due mainly to the development of the Danish-seine method of fishing, which has caused a general diminution in the flounder stocks of the area. Though the Thames Firth (south of the line from Deadman Point to Ponui Passage Light) has been closed to Danish-seining since the year 1924, these vessels operate on the lower grounds to which both flounders and dabs migrate, and the result of intensive Danish-seining operations during the last ten years, and especially during the last three years, has been a considerable reduction in the general stock of flatfish in the whole area. In 1934 the area closed to Danish-seining was extended for one month and in 1935 for two months (August and September), so as to prevent the operations of Danish-seiners on the grounds that are frequented at this time of year by spawning flounders and dabs. Observations made by Mr. E. W. Gilliver, Inspector of Fisheries, Coromandel, on the fish and on the floating eggs of dabs and flounders indicated that though some flounders were spawning in July, 1935, the general spawning of both species occurred during the period of the closure. On 1st January, 1936, a regulation, gazetted on 8th August, 1935, came into force, by which the minimum size of the mesh in the cod-end of Danish-seines was limited to 5 in. instead of the former 4½ in. This was designed to prevent the capture of any fish in undue quantities until they have reached a reasonable size.

The restricted areas available for Danish-seine fishing in the Hauraki Gulf and the increased numbers and power of the vessels using this method of fishing have led to an augmented exploitation of the fishing-grounds in the Bay of Plenty, from which some very substantial catches have been brought to the Auckland markets. In consequence of this there have been many protests from residents along the coast of the Bay of Plenty who complain that the inshore fishing-grounds have been impoverished. The coastal grounds between Takatu Point and Bream Head to the north have been the field of similar actions and reactions. To what extent these complaints would justify measures of restriction that would increase the difficulties with which the Auckland fishermen pursue their calling is a question which cannot be decided with any confidence on the basis of the evidence at present available. The problem is not merely that of preserving for the row-boat fisherman the good and easy fishing that he enjoyed in former years—it is doubtful whether that could or should be done in any case—but rather that of conserving the stock of fish to be available without diminishing returns for commercial purposes in the future. If measures to this end are to be taken on a sound basis and in a manner that will be just to all the interests concerned, it will be necessary for the Department to be equipped for acquiring more precise and more comprehensive information on the fish and on the practices and results of the fishing operations than has hitherto been the case. It must be recognized that with the exception of the snapper and flounder fisheries of the Hauraki Gulf, on which a certain amount of practical knowledge has been acquired, and, to a less extent, the flounder fisheries of the Tasman Bay area, where belated investigations have recently been made, the exploitation of our sea fisheries has been going on without any real surveillance on the part of the Department that is responsible for their conservation.

The Hawke's Bay area was worked during the year by ten Napier trawlers and two Danish-seiners, but here no controversy with inshore fishermen has been voiced, probably because the deep-sea fishing grounds are more extensive in relation to the number of vessels operating, and rival fishing methods do not jostle each other to the same extent. Compared with the 1934–35 figures, the returns of fish landed at Napier show a slight increase; but if a comparison is made with the last year before the earthquake the decline in the Napier fishing industry is very evident:—

	Quantity. Cwt.	Value. £
1929–30	16,908	25,922
1934–35	14,887	12,196
1935–36	16,421	13,782

Flatfish have formerly been an important part of the Napier fish supply. During the last year the catches of this class of fish have been very poor, and consequently the market value of the landings has declined. The scarcity of these fish on the usually very productive Napier grounds has been such