

PART I.

APPOINTMENT OF COMMITTEE.

THE Sea Fisheries Investigation Committee, comprising as members Mr. James Thorn, M.P., Mr. M. W. Young, Assistant Chief Inspector of Fisheries, Marine Department, and Mr. E. Sheed, Investigating Accountant, Department of Industries and Commerce, was appointed by His Excellency the Governor-General on the 25th February, 1937, and the Hon. D. G. Sullivan, Minister of Industries and Commerce, delegated to its members the powers of judicial inquiry and investigation conferred upon him by the Board of Trade Amendment Act, 1923.

REPORT.

To the Hon. DANIEL GILES SULLIVAN,
Minister of Industries and Commerce.

SIR,—

Upon the appointment of the Sea Fisheries Investigation Committee, you furnished it with an order of reference setting out in general and in particular those matters upon which it was desired that investigation and report be made. This order of reference was as follows :—

“The Committee shall inquire into and report upon—

“(1) The condition and prospect of the sea-fishing industry of New Zealand, including investigations into any matter relating to the exploitation and conservation of our sea fisheries; the catching, landing, treatment, preservation, storage, transport, internal and external marketing and distribution (both wholesale and retail) of sea fish, shellfish, and other marketable marine products.

“(2) The scientific evaluation, control, and administration of the sea fisheries.”

Extending over a period of years and up to the time of the Committee's appointment, Dominion-wide representations had been made to the Government as to the difficulties under which the sea-fisheries industry generally was operating, and as to the apparent lack of any real co-operation amongst the various units engaged in production and marketing. So varied and conflicting in their nature were the complaints received, that it was obvious that before any remedial measures could be formulated complete information concerning the conditions prevailing should be in the hands of the Government. As any effective investigation would necessarily have to cover fully the ramifications of the industry, the order of reference gave the Committee sufficient power to inquire into all the problems associated with its main objective as they were confronted.

The Committee commenced its duties at Bluff on the 15th day of March, 1937. Between this date and the 8th day of September, 1937, the Committee visited thirty-eight ports and centres and heard evidence continuously. Additional evidence was taken at intervals up to early in November, when the investigation was closed. In all, the Committee took evidence from and examined a total of 537 witnesses, besides making contact with 288 others associated with the industry, these latter being met during the Committee's visits to wholesale markets, refrigerating-plants, retailers' shops, fishing-vessels, harbours and landing-places, and at general meetings of the fishermen. Ample notification of the Committee's sittings in each of the centres visited was given beforehand, so that all parties interested were enabled to submit evidence to the extent desired. The witnesses comprised fishermen and fishing-boat owners, wholesalers, exporters, retailers, cannerymen, representatives of employees and associations, and certain others who, while not directly connected with the industry, were invited to place before the Committee suggestions they thought constructive. Wherever possible and whenever there was an identity of interest, witnesses were encouraged to come before the Committee in groups, the right being reserved, of course, to witnesses to appear individually if they so preferred. During the Committee's inquiries, extending from Stewart Island to North Auckland, over 3,102 foolscap pages of evidence were taken, and, in addition, a wide variety of “exhibits” was handed in for examination, together with statements of accounts, costs, and financial operations. Further information as to the earnings of fishermen, costs of handling, and financial results generally was extracted from the records kept by fishermen, wholesalers, retailers, and others.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE INDUSTRY.

Before proceeding to a description of the fishing methods and problems in the various ports and to a statement of the Committee's recommendations thereupon, it is desirable to outline in some detail certain considerations which establish the very great importance of the industry to New Zealand. These mainly relate to—

- (a) The financial investment, employment in, and revenue from the fisheries;
- (b) The value of fish products as a foodstuff, and the desirability of their increased consumption in the Dominion; and
- (c) The influence of the export trade on local supplies and on the economic organization of the industry.