

Evidence of depletion which supports the statements of the witnesses is furnished by the Marine Department's annual reports. The returns for the Port of Tauranga are :—

Year ended 31st March,	Fishing-vessels.			Shore Hands.	Fish landed.
	Danish Seine.	Line and Net.	Fishermen.		
					Cwt.
1932	2	28	72	6	8,818
1933	4	15	42	4	6,743
1934	3	10	25	4	6,046
1935	2	15	30	4	4,800
1936	3	15	30	4	4,250
1937	3	14	25	4	3,988

Following the date on which the Committee opened its sittings in the North Island, two of the three Danish-seiners which had fished out of Tauranga during the year ended 31st March, 1937, were withdrawn and laid up, it having been impossible to catch sufficient fish to make their continued operation profitable. In at least one case the engine had been removed on account of financial difficulties by the time the Committee reached Tauranga.

It will be seen that the landings dropped progressively each year from 8,818 cwt. in 1932 to 3,988 cwt. in 1937, although the fleet from 1933 onwards has been materially the same. Even allowing a certain weakness in the earlier years in the collection of statistics, any deficiency which might have occurred would not have altered the weight of the landings to the extent and in the manner shown. Under the circumstances, the Committee feels that some restriction on the activities of the Auckland Danish-seining fleet in these areas is called for. As the Auckland boats which work in these waters are all large, highly powered vessels capable of towing their gear, thereby changing their status from Danish-seiners to trawlers, a practice which they adopt on every possible occasion, it is reasonable that they should be subjected to the same restrictions as trawlers. The recommendations are intended to provide some measure of conservation of the inshore fisheries and to grant protection to the local fishing industry in the various coastal towns.

In regard to the Bay of Plenty ports, we feel that the operations of the present small Danish-seining fleet can safely be allowed to proceed, but no addition to the fleet should be permitted to operate in the waters we have recommended to be closed.

Mercury Bay and Whangamata.

The fishermen from these centres desired that the seine boats should be kept at least one mile off shore all along the coast, as they allege that the seiners have depleted their line-fishing grounds and also interfered with crayfishing operations. They informed the Committee that the number of fishing-vessels operating out of Mercury Bay had declined from twenty-six to seven, and that there had been a corresponding decline in the number of people supported by the industry and in the annual landings. Unfortunately, no statistics are available with which this statement might be supported. The men stated that three months after the seine boats commenced operations in this area the Kennedy Bay "bank" had gone back alarmingly as a line-fishing ground. First the hand-lines failed to return a satisfactory catch, then set-lines were used, but with a similar experience. The men were positive that there are snapper-spawning grounds in this district, they having caught fish which were "running ripe." They considered that the whole area enclosed by a line drawn from the south side of Port Charles to the Red Mercury Island and thence to the south side of the Bay should be restricted against Danish-seining from November to February. It was alleged that the Auckland seine boats make regular trips to Mercury Bay at six-weekly intervals, and that while there they all trawl and never put down their anchors. Moreover, it was asserted that the seine boats do not respect even the present small restrictions on seine fishing in the bay itself, and continually seine within the limits at night. Unfortunately, the men do not care to give such evidence to the authorities as would lead to the conviction of the offenders, as they rely on the seine boats for bait, and they consider that it is the Government's duty to provide an adequate patrol service. The Committee impressed on these witnesses that it was their duty to assist the Government in any endeavour it made to protect them, by reporting such offenders and by giving evidence in Court.

The Committee feels that if these large seine boats cannot operate economically at a distance of one mile off the shore, there is something radically wrong with their method of fishing, and it should be prohibited altogether.

Thames.

At Thames, where the main supply is drawn from the set-net boats operating on the flats at the head of the Firth, there is naturally strong objection to the operation of Danish-seiners, especially in the lower reaches of the Firth. The fishermen traced the decline of the inshore Danish-seining to overfishing and to the growth of the large modern fleet now operating in the outer Gulf and in the Bay of Plenty. Only the smaller units unfit to work outside are working the inshore grounds now left open. The effect of the operations of the Danish seine fleet on the "Dab Patch"—the flounder-spawning ground—and its repercussions on the set-net fishing on the Thames flats were also subjects of discussion during the