

(These questions are further considered in the section dealing with the Southland blue-cod fisheries.) We were also informed that, due to lack of supervision, the summer visitors take a large number of blue cod under the legal size, thereby offsetting the good done by the fishermen in conserving the stocks. When large parties are aboard launches, it is the practice for each individual to deny responsibility for any undersized fish found on the vessel, so no action beyond confiscation of the fish can be taken by the Inspector.

Napier.

The hand-line fishery in Napier is not important. One man catches a quantity of blue cod off Cape Kidnappers and also fishes for groper. He reported to the Committee that the groper are declining on the grounds where he carries on this occupation.

Whakatane, Tauranga, and Cape Colville.

Hand-lines are only used in the summer period in the Whakatane and Tauranga districts, but the grounds are now so depleted that their operation yields a meagre return for the labours of the men employed.

With the exception of certain special hand-line fisheries which are dealt with in the following pages, the hand-line fishery in the rest of New Zealand is negligible. The recommendations covering the special fisheries follow each section. Our recommendations with regard to hand-line fishing at the other ports are as follows:—

Recommendations.

French Pass and Sounds.

1. That investigations be undertaken as soon as possible to obtain definite information as to the quantity of undersized fish taken on the various sizes of hooks and the additional mortality or injury caused by hooks of small size. If this data shows that the use of these small hooks is detrimental to the fishery, they should be prohibited in these waters.

2. As it is believed that certain boat-owners (not fishermen) evade the regulation dealing with the size-limit of blue cod by filleting the undersized fish before landing, steps should be taken either to curb this practice or to evolve some method by which the size of the fish from which the fillet was taken can be accurately stated.

3. It should be made imperative for every hired launch taking fishing parties in the Sounds district to have the extracts of the blue cod regulations as issued free by the Marine Department prominently displayed aboard the vessel.

4. If it is possible to so legislate, the fish on board any boat should be legally defined as being in the possession of the master of such boat.

SPECIAL FISHERIES.

CHATHAM ISLANDS.

The fishery at the Chatham Islands consists entirely of hand-lining for blue cod. A small quantity of hapuka (groper), trumpeter, and other varieties are also taken, but marketing difficulties prevent these fish from being utilized to the extent desirable. All the boats fish for one or other of two companies: the N.Z. Fisheries, Ltd., in which case the catch is landed daily at one of the two fishing ports equipped with freezers, or the South Seas Fishing Co., Ltd., in which case the fish are taken aboard the mother ship "South Sea," where they are cleaned, packed, frozen, and transported to New Zealand. The "South Sea" (mother ship) had six launches fishing with her at the time of our investigation, and N.Z. Fisheries, Ltd., was taking the catch from the balance of the fleet. (For total number of vessels in the fleet, see Appendix C.)

In the opinion of those well qualified to judge, the grounds, more particularly the nearby ones, are starting to show signs of strain. When only the shore stations were operating the fleet did not use the more distant grounds, and these acted as a reserve, but with the advent of the "South Sea" as a mobile factory the position was materially altered, all the grounds being then subject to exploitation. It is assessed that the annual production by the two companies should not exceed twenty thousand cases, and production should be limited to that amount. This quantity can be absorbed by the markets, mainly Australian, without causing any depression in the price.

The quantities of fish shipped from the Chatham Islands over a period of ten years, with the number of vessels making the catch in each year, is shown in Appendix C. This table shows that the average annual production of blue cod during the period in which both companies have been operating has been 17,014 cwt., which, taking the case as equal to 68 lb. net, equals 28,441 cases. This is something like eight thousand cases over and above what the grounds are estimated to be able to provide each year over a period.

The companies have suggested a close season during the spawning season, as this suits their arrangement to close down when the catches are normally low, but the Government could not make a close season, with all its attendant hardships to the men, until such time as an investigation established that some measures of conservation are necessary. When only one company was operating it was the practice to close the works during the summer, and as the two companies are now working in very close agreement there is nothing to prevent them from doing so now if they consider it desirable. Further, if a close season is declared it would be for a rigidly enforced period, but as the incidence of the spawning season varies and the weather interferes with fishing operations more in some years than in others it is not desirable that operations should be suspended on a definite date when perhaps freedom of operation for another month would make all the difference between a successful and an unsuccessful year not only for the fishermen, but for the companies concerned.