

Recommendation.*Foveaux Strait.*

1. The Committee recommends that the size-limits for blue cod as set out in the regulations gazetted on 2nd April, 1936—*i.e.*, that the length of blue cod in its natural state shall be not less than 13 in. and not less than $10\frac{3}{4}$ in. when properly headed—be enforced in this area.

CRAYFISH.

Southland.

There is no great activity in regard to the catching of crayfish in the Southland district. Sufficient are caught to supply the local requirements. Some attempt was made to build up a canned crayfish trade, but the intermittent supplies in conjunction with certain technical difficulties prevented this enterprise from being carried to a successful conclusion. Good stocks of crayfish are reported from various localities in the district, particularly in the west coast Sounds, but they are all found at points too far removed from the only available cannery. The erection of special plant at isolated points to deal with crayfish alone is an expensive and risky proceeding.

Otago and South Canterbury.

The main crayfishing centres in these districts are Karitane, Moeraki, and Taieri Mouth. Before the export market collapsed owing to the application of a quota in France, arrangements had been made for the purchase of large supplies from these districts by the various firms engaged in the industry. After one year of intensive fishing to supply the heavy demand, the grounds showed marked signs of depletion. This was noticeable not so much in the quantities of fish coming forward, but in the alarming decrease in size. The Moeraki grounds suffered worst and have not recovered. Taieri Mouth, which was not exploited so much, suffered least, and these grounds are now coming back to normal. The state of the Karitane grounds is rather doubtful, as, although it was noticed that when the question of conservation was being discussed the fishermen would agree to the prohibition of the taking of "berried" females, they would not agree to even a mild restriction on the size. From this it would appear that there is still a large proportion of small crayfish in the landings. The cannery at Dunedin provides a market for crayfish, but the fishermen complain that the low prices offered and the intermittent market, due to its dependence on overseas orders, make their livelihood precarious. The methods used in taking the crayfish in these waters by means of supplejack pots are satisfactory and call for no comment.

Canterbury (Akaroa and Kaikoura).

The Christchurch markets draw their supplies of crayfish from Akaroa and Kaikoura. At Akaroa the men use hoop-nets, generally working about twelve nets at a time. The excess catch is kept in floating boxes until required. The grounds in use are about four to five miles from the Heads. It was definitely stated that the size of the catch is declining. At one time it was possible for a boat to catch up to twenty sacks per day in September, October, or November, but to-day half that amount is a good catch. The decline is not attributed to overfishing, as there has not been any excessive fishing in the last ten years, and no definite reason was assigned to it. Very few small crayfish—*i.e.*, under 9 in.—are taken from these grounds, the mesh of the nets used being large enough to let the small fish escape. The proportion of "berried" females varies during the season. In the early part of the season two-thirds of the catch are females, but later on the males constitute the major portion of the catch. The crayfish cannery at Akaroa only operates for two or three months in the year, so that its operation cannot be blamed for the depletion. To illustrate the fact that the depletion here is not caused by overfishing, it may be noted that for the last seven or eight years only two or three boats have engaged solely in crayfishing, and then only for three months in the year. Ten years ago ten vessels were engaged, and each was landing from ten to twenty sacks per day. The only factor which we consider can have had any influence on the crayfish stocks off Akaroa is the unduly high proportion of "berried" females removed in the earlier part of the season.

At Kaikoura the grounds which have been exploited are those round about the Peninsula. The hoop-net is the usual type of gear employed. The season here extends over seven months, commencing in June, but the flush of the season is limited to three months. The crayfish landed are generally of fair size, the smaller ones being discarded. "Berried" females do not constitute an unduly high proportion of the catch. The fishermen were willing to accept a restriction from a proposed export company against the taking of crayfish under 10 in. in length and against the taking of "berried" females. The evidence received in regard to the available supplies and depletion was very conflicting. The older men, some of whom have been crayfishing in Kaikoura for up to twenty-five years, were positive that the catches landed per boat have decreased considerably in that time. The younger men were of the opinion that there are inexhaustible supplies. It may be as well to point out that the men who were most sanguine as to the supplies were those interested in the formation of a company which wished to enter the export trade. Admittedly, a large portion of the coast between Amuri Bluff and Cape Campbell is crayfish ground and might be used by the Kaikoura men if the present grounds become depleted, but it must be explained that the relatively higher working-costs on these more distant grounds will tend to keep the fleet working on the nearby grounds until the depletion reaches the stage where the returns realized will barely cover the cost of catching. When this occurs, the men, having to rely on the more distant grounds for supplies intended for the local market in Christchurch, will have to insist on an increase in price, and this is not desirable. It is essential that a careful watch should be kept on any large export activities in this area. At the first signs of overfishing, restrictions should be imposed to save the fishery before the depletion is so advanced as to make recovery impossible or at the best a very lengthy process.