

*Picton and Port Underwood.*

The fishermen operating from Wairau Bar take crayfish at various points along the coast from White's Bay to Tory Channel. Hoop-nets approximately 2 ft. 6 in. in diameter are used. The main crayfish ground is, however, at Island Bay, near Port Underwood. The stocks here appear to have been well maintained, as the fishing has not been intensive and has been limited to a short season.

A recent development has been the exploitation of these grounds by fishermen from Wellington, who use methods which will lead to depletion of the worst sort and to other problems if they are not checked at the outset. The men are catching the crayfish by means of set-nets. It is reported that this method of fishing has ruined the grounds near Wellington, and the local men, while conceding the Wellington fishermen the right to come over and fish where they like, are perturbed about the methods adopted. The worst feature of this exploitation is that some of the Wellington men have been in the habit of leaving their nets set not only overnight, but, if bad weather comes on, for days at a time. After the nets have been down for a day the crayfish are nearly all dead or dying, and as dead crayfish are not accepted by the buyers they are thrown overboard and wasted. This excessive wastage is the source of much complaint. The attitude taken is that if these Wellington men desire to catch crayfish they should attend to their gear and not go off on other work or home to Wellington until the gear is lifted. It is also alleged that the large quantity of dead crayfish left by these Wellington men has attracted vermin, such as blind eels and sea lice, to these grounds, very much to their detriment as fishing areas.

*Napier.*

Very little crayfishing is done at Napier. Two men engage in this fishery for the bulk of their time, but supplies have been very scarce. At Cape Kidnappers one man uses ring-nets, and reports that the catch has been declining steadily on the inshore grounds.

*Gisborne.*

At this port three vessels do a little crayfishing to supply the local market. Box-type traps 3 ft. long are used, and the catch is landed each day and no surplus is kept alive in floating "coffs." The grounds are close inshore between Taumoto Island and the Breakwater. The crayfish grounds are not very extensive, but the supplies are being maintained. The landings could be increased slightly if there was any demand. "Berried" females are taken, as they can be sold in Gisborne. The men often catch many small crayfish between 7 in. and 8 in. in length, but these are returned to the water.

*Mercury Bay.*

The fishermen from Mercury Bay and Waihi Beach appeared before the Committee at Thames. They reported that crayfishing was carried on at various points between Whangamata and Cape Colville, the centre of the greatest supply being at Mercury Bay (Whitianga). There are two seasons for the taking of crayfish from these waters, one from July to September with a short break in October, and another from November till after Christmas. Supplies are not being diminished by the present fishing, and, indeed, stood up fairly well to the heavy abstractions of up to 25 tons per week during the short time the export trade flourished, but in the opinion of one of the more experienced men such a rate of abstraction could not have continued for long, there being unmistakable signs that the supplies were commencing to decline. "Berried" females are not paid for, and the small fish are not marketed in this district. These small fish are the cause of the break between Christmas and July, as they constitute the major portion of the catch—at least 75 per cent. during this period. The pots used are left down continuously, but are lifted each day and the fish removed. The crayfish-men follow the crayfish out when they leave the inshore rocks and migrate to the sand and kelp bottom. When fishing under these conditions, they suffer damage to their gear by the action of the seine boats shooting their lines round the area where the pots are placed. They asked for a limit of one mile offshore to be placed on the seiners, so as to leave some ground clear for crayfishing and lining.

As undersized and "berried" crayfish are not taken from these grounds for the market, the Committee has no recommendations to make except those applying to crayfishing generally. With regard to the action of the Danish-seine boats, the Committee's recommendations will be found under that heading.

*Auckland.*

The crayfish which supply the Auckland market both for local consumption and export come from the vicinity of Cape Colville and Mercury Bay and some from Kawau. Only seven vessels are engaged full-time in this fishery, the total landings from all sources in Auckland, Mercury Bay, and other places being no more than two thousand five hundred sacks for the year ending 31st March, 1937. Complaints were received as to the practice of taking undersized and egg-bearing crayfish. In the interests of conservation it is desirable that this practice should stop.

*North Auckland.*

*Russell.*—Crayfishing in a limited degree is done at the Bay of Islands. The restriction on the fishing is not imposed by the paucity of the stocks, but by the fact that the Whangarei market can only absorb a limited number of crayfish each week. Catches were stated to be good between July and Christmas in each year. The fishermen use about ten pots at a time. The crayfish caught average about 2 lb. weight each, and are shipped in beer cases holding two dozen crayfish. There is at present no satisfactory shipping service to Auckland, all the sea transport being done by auxiliary schooners whose schedules are not regular enough for the fish trade.