

Totara North (Whangaroa).—Two of the three full-time fishermen here depend mainly on crayfishing. The supplies vary from year to year, but the average landing is roughly the same over a period of years. The crayfish grounds worked are from Matauri Bay to Whangaroa; about seventeen miles of coast-line. Mainly large crayfish are taken, up to 5 lb. in weight. The price realized is approximately 10s. per dozen, but the market is poor, there being no satisfactory service to Auckland or Whangarei. When the canning factory was in operation up to 6 tons per week were being taken from these grounds. The supplies were maintained during the period of operation of the factory.

New Plymouth and Wanganui.—These towns draw practically all their crayfish-supplies from Wellington. The Borough Inspector at New Plymouth and all the retailers interviewed in both towns complained of receiving large numbers of small and "berried" crayfish from Wellington, in spite of repeated protests. In one case the ova cleaned off a sack of females filled a gallon tin. In weight the retailer loses up to 20 lb. of ova (which he must remove to ensure sale in these towns) in every 100 lb. of the crayfish received. In one sack, sixty-three crayfish were found which measured less than 6 in. in length, and thirty-four of these were loaded with ova. The worst months for these complaints are July, August, and September. This Committee cannot condone such wastage, as it must ultimately have a damaging effect on the stocks.

Recommendations.

New Zealand.

1. That the legal size of crayfish be fixed at 9 in. in length.
2. That it be made illegal to take or sell female crayfish carrying external ova.
3. That it be made illegal to remove the ova (berries) from any female crayfish prior to either wholesale or retail sale.
4. That investigations be made as to the crayfish stocks at the various centres, and that a study be made of the habits, size, sex groups, and migrations of the crayfish, the results of these investigations to be the basis for future legislation.
5. That regulations be adopted immediately to force fishermen using set-nets for catching crayfish to stand by their gear until such time as it is lifted. It should be made illegal for such gear to be left set overnight.
6. The buoys on the set-net gear should be plainly marked with the registered letters and numbers of the boat from which the gear was set.
7. Fishery Inspectors should be authorized to lift and confiscate any net set for crayfish which has been set for any period exceeding four hours unless the boat to which the gear belongs is standing by the gear.
8. It should be ruled that any set-net to which bait of any description is tied or fastened is a set-net used for the purpose of taking crayfish.

THE OYSTER FISHERIES.

DREDGE OYSTERS.

Foveaux Strait.

This industry may be divided into two parts—(a) Production; (b) Marketing.

Production.—The dredge oysters are more commonly referred to as "Bluff," "Stewart Island," or "mud" oysters, the last being a definite misnomer, as they are not found on a mud bottom at all, but on a bottom consisting of shell and gravel. The oysters are obtained by dredging from small steam and Diesel engined vessels operating in various parts of the Foveaux Strait. Contrary to public opinion, which unfortunately has often been misled by statements provided by interested parties and published in the press and in certain company prospectuses, the oysters are not distributed over the whole floor of the sea in quantities sufficiently large to be worth exploitation. In point of fact, the beds on which the oysters have been found to exist in such quantities as offer a fair return for the expenditure and labour necessary are definitely localized, so localized, indeed, that it requires a fair measure of skill to bring the vessels to those points which yield profitable returns. These beds may be primarily divided into two main areas—those in the shallow water lying to the eastward of a line drawn from Dog Island to Bird Island, and consisting of the East Bed and Ruapuke Bed, and those lying in deeper water to the westward of such a line and known as the West Bed and Saddle Bed.

It is an established fact that the oysters obtained from the eastern beds in comparatively shallow water are usually of larger size and in better condition than those from the beds in the deeper water. As a result of this higher quality, and also of the fact that the eastern beds are nearer to the Bluff, the bulk of the oyster-supplies has been taken from the East and nearby beds. Latterly, because of the decline in the catch per landing of the vessels operating on these eastern beds, more attention has been paid to the West Bed, but as the East Bed oysters are definitely of better quality this bed is never completely rested and given a chance to recuperate.

Nearly all the competent witnesses examined stressed the fact that the eastern beds were showing unmistakable evidence of depletion, so much so that in recent seasons the crews of the oyster vessels, who are all paid on the basis of their production, have shown a decided disinclination to work these beds, where the catch per day is so low as to materially affect their earnings. In some cases, more especially after complaints from retailers as to the size and quality of the oysters supplied, or to supply special markets, the owners have definitely ordered the vessels to proceed to these depleted grounds in order to procure a quantity of the better-class oysters. The depletion is