

so evident that the majority of the oyster firms concerned offered to render assistance to the Government by way of the provision of vessels and gear with the object of making a comprehensive survey of the whole of the existing beds and exploration for new beds which are thought to exist further to the westward of those known at present, and also further to the eastward. Due to the fact that the main current in Foveaux Strait runs from west to east, the western beds probably supply a substantial proportion of the young oysters on the beds lying to the eastward. With this in view, heavy abstractions from the western beds should not be permitted until such time as the Government is satisfied that their stocks are not only sufficiently heavy to stand such abstractions, but to leave a sufficiency of breeding-stock.

In view of the alarming increase in the landings of oysters in recent years, and keeping before us the fact that any depletion of the oyster stocks cannot be made up by intensive cultivation or by other means suitable for overcoming deficiencies in commodities produced on land, the question of the limitation of the fleet was discussed by the Committee and the witnesses at considerable length. The fleet has increased from five full-time vessels in 1928 to ten full-time vessels and two part-time vessels in 1937, with at least one more full-time vessel for 1938, and, in addition, several other persons are desirous of entering the oyster industry. As during an eight-months season when the fleet is favoured by fine weather and no time is lost by casualties each of the full-time vessels is capable of producing ten thousand sacks of oysters, we can see the necessity for some limitation in the number of producing units, more especially since the beds are already showing signs of the strain caused by the increased production of recent years.

A table of the annual production of oysters from 1913 to 1937 is appended (see Appendix D). From this table it will be seen that the average annual production from 1913 to 1927 was 26,344 sacks, from 1928 to 1932 was 38,984 sacks, and from 1933 to 1937 had increased to 54,493 sacks. Consideration of these figures, coupled with the evidence tendered as to depletion, leads your Committee to believe that it is high time to call a halt in the increase of abstractions from these beds until such time as a proper stocktaking can be made. To give some idea of the proposals for increased production, the case of the Stewart Island Canneries, Ltd., may be cited. In 1932 this company required 1,000 sacks of oysters; in 1933, 2,017 sacks; 1934, 3,112 sacks; 1935, 4,511 sacks; and in 1936, 13,375 sacks. The company then found that it was impossible to obtain its full supplies from the other merchants, and application was made for permission to commence operations with a vessel of its own. After due consideration this was granted, the necessary licenses issued, and the vessel commenced operations. Before the end of the season the company had put in an application for an additional vessel, as the catch of the first vessel plus the surplus supplies purchased from the merchants was not sufficient to meet its requirements. This application was declined on the advice of the Committee, as the Committee did not favour any further abstractions from the beds until a survey had been made. The company hopes ultimately to use fifty thousand sacks per annum, or nearly as much as the supplies for the whole of New Zealand, and wants a minimum of twenty-four thousand sacks per annum. Practically the whole of this produce is required by the company for export.

Nearly every witness commented on the absurdity of the present legal size for these oysters. The relevant regulation states that the oyster must not pass through a metal ring having an inside diameter of $1\frac{3}{4}$ in. It is contended that the majority of oysters which would pass through a ring of even $2\frac{1}{8}$ in. diameter would not be worth the trouble of opening. So long as the limit remains at $1\frac{3}{4}$ in. there will be some carelessness in culching, which results in an excessive number of small oysters being put in the sack. As these small oysters are of little or no use commercially, they are dumped by the retailer and represent not only loss to the beds, but a cause of complaint in the trade. The raising of the limit size would not affect the men's earnings to any extent, but it would tend to bring crews that are careless in their culching up to the standard of the crews that do the job properly.

Many of the oystermen who tendered evidence were convinced that the use of oversize, heavy, and deep-bitted dredges was a serious contributing factor in the depletion of the beds. They asserted that these dredges break too large a percentage of the oysters on the bottom, and, further, that by digging in too deep they disturb the bottom unduly and tend to kill off the marine life which is necessary to the well-being of the oyster, and to cover up the good oysters with shell and rubbish. Limitation as to the size of the dredge and the depth of the "bit" was given serious consideration by the Committee.

Districts other than Foveaux Strait (Dunedin and Akaroa).

In recent years many statements have appeared in the press alleging the discovery of oyster-beds at various places on the east coast of the South Island, more particularly off Akaroa and Dunedin. There can be no claim to the discovery of these oysters recently, as the presence of oysters in small quantities wherever the bottom is suitable has been known to fishermen working off these ports for many years. There is, however, the question of whether these oyster-beds are of sufficient density to make it worth while either surveying or working them. With this object in view the Committee subjected competent witnesses at Akaroa and Port Chalmers to a close examination to ascertain if there were definite facts to support the statements made.

At Dunedin the Committee had before it the fisherman who was associated with the trial workings of the bed reported off Otago Heads. This witness gave every assistance in the Committee's inquiries. He stated that, although there are quantities of oysters to be obtained from the area which he prospected, the return he could get was insufficient to justify the fitting-out of his vessel with oyster-dredging gear, because he could earn much more in the same time by fishing. It may be pointed out here that oyster-dredging, if it is to be carried out successfully, calls for the installation of specialized gear, and the presence of this gear aboard a small or medium sized vessel would interfere with her normal fishing operations. The deck space on any of our motor-tractors is so small that it would be necessary to dismantle and put ashore the oyster gear before the ship could use her trawling gear effectively. This rules out the possibility of a part-time fishery.