

From the Christchurch Fish Retailers' Association and from retailers individually representations were made as to matters concerning :—

- (1) The irregularity of supply and the shortage of fish experienced over a period of five months in the year.
- (2) The methods allegedly adopted to keep wholesale prices high and the effect of export requirements upon wholesale prices.
- (3) The relatively high level of wholesale prices as compared with former years, the uneconomic volumes of turnover, the necessity for utilizing rough fish as being lower priced, and other matters affecting retail distribution.

In regard to irregularities in supply and periods of short-supply, these are ever-present difficulties which are not incapable of being overcome through better organization of the industry as a whole. Complaints were made that the retention of certain quantities for export through the imposition of reserve prices was a factor instrumental in raising price-levels to the retailer, and, moreover, that the indirect interest held by the auctioneering firm in a large retail shop was used to the disadvantage of retailers generally. It is not considered that the latter position is abused, seeing that one shop only is concerned and its turnover must necessarily amount to only a very small percentage of the total sold from Christchurch retail shops.

As to export, retailers admitted that this trade is essential at times in order to relieve the supply position, otherwise there would be hopeless gluts at certain times of the year. As in Dunedin, however, it is clear that, while the fishermen benefit, the export trade results in the retailer and the consumer being called upon to pay higher prices than would otherwise be the case.

From the viewpoint of convenience to the public it would be difficult to say whether or not there are too many retail fish-shops in Christchurch (there are fifty odd), but the fact remains that uneconomic volumes of turnover, combined with irregularities in supply and fluctuating wholesale prices, have resulted in poor returns in a great number of cases, and retailers of cooked fish in Christchurch, more so than in any other part of the Dominion, have voluntarily or involuntarily adopted the practice of utilizing "rough" fish. They maintain that it is only by doing this that any profit margins within reason can be secured at all, and the practice has spread competitively until it is general throughout the city and will not readily revert to the general sale of what is usually looked upon as better-class fish. It should be clearly understood, of course, that "rough" fish, as it is called, is perfectly wholesome and no doubt contains a nutrition value equal to that of other varieties.

The question of shop hours appeared to be giving retailers some concern, particularly in regard to the competitive element as between wet and cooked fish shops, between shops employing labour and the "family" shop, and also between city and suburban shops. This is a matter of no little difficulty and upon which the retailers are submitting their representations to the Department of Labour. Mention should be made here of the frequency with which individuals with little or no experience enter the fish retail trade with a small amount of capital. After a brief period, in which they might go to extremes to build up custom, these people find themselves in difficulties and drop out, by which time they have caused serious concern and loss of trade to established units in the immediate vicinity. For this and other reasons the Christchurch Fish Retailers' Association sought the introduction of a licensing system concerning retail shops, but the Committee is of opinion that, while such a request might be considered when more important matters are dealt with, it should be deferred in the meantime.

Retailers pointed out that it is in their interests that the public should be acquainted with the reason why there is often such a wide price spread between the fishermen's return and the retail price. Publicity will be given to this matter in this report.

*Christchurch Marketing.*—Although few specific requests were made by fishermen and retailers for alteration in the present system of marketing, the general inference was that the position is unsatisfactory from many points of view, and the remarks applicable to Dunedin apply with equal force here. These may be briefly recapitulated as—

- (1) Fluctuating and uncertain returns to the fishermen.
- (2) The combination of auctioneering with that of exercising virtual control over steam trawlers and of exporting and selling wholesale.
- (3) The insecure position of retailers in the matter of the wholesale price of their product.
- (4) The adverse effect upon consumption of frequent variations in retail prices.

In regard to (4), it will be a matter of interest and no doubt of concern that in Christchurch over the past six months retail prices of representative varieties of fish have shown a range in price per pound of from, *e.g.*, 9d. to 1s. 3d., 3d. to 9d., 8d. to 1s. 4d., and in one class of fillets—*viz.*, sole fillets—the range has been 1s. 3d. to 2s. 6d. per pound (see Appendix J). There is frequently a fluctuation in any one week from the lowest to the highest price, and, this being so, there must naturally be a discouragement on the part of the public to buy fish with any semblance of regularity. Retailers contend, and the Committee supports the contention, that if there were a continuity of supply of fish at an even price over the whole year there would be a considerable increase in turnover all round. The only way to secure an even price is by some method of fixation of the wholesale price.

*Canterbury Steam Trawling Co., Ltd.*—The Canterbury Steam Trawling Co., Ltd., with a paid-up capital of £7,000, operates two steam trawlers from Lyttelton—one of these recently being wrecked. The principal shareholder is the managing-director of Messrs. P. Feron and Son, Ltd. These two trawlers have supplied as high as 22 per cent. of the total fish coming into the Christchurch market in a six-monthly period, but, as mentioned elsewhere, the bulk of the trawler catches is retained for export or for sale ex freezer in times of relatively short supply.