

NATIVE AFFAIRS COMMITTEE.—Report on the petition of Rewi Karuarua and 6 others, praying that the Bill relating to the taking of flounders may not be brought into force.

I AM directed to report that, in the opinion of the Committee, this petition should be referred to the Government.

21st, August 1891.

WM. KELLY, Chairman.

1st August, 1891.

To the Hon. the SPEAKER and the MEMBERS of the HOUSE of REPRESENTATIVES of New Zealand in Parliament assembled. Salutations. The humble petition of Rewi Koruarua and others humbly sheweth,—

1. THAT this is a petition from the people of Taumutu respecting a Bill that has been introduced to the Parliament in connection with the fish called the flounder, or what the Natives call the patiki. That Bill provides that no flounder shall be taken unless they be 11in. long.

2. Now, your petitioners pray that that Bill may not be brought into force.

3. That we do not wish that Bill to be passed, because we are constantly taking those fish, and while doing so we take both small and large together. We cannot help doing that, because the mesh of our nets are only 1in. square; therefore, we hope that that Bill will not be brought into force.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

REWI KORUARUA and 6 others.

The Hon. Sir J. HALL to the Hon. the MINISTER of MARINE.

SIR,—

Wellington, 21st August, 1891.

I am given to understand that steps are being taken with a view of inducing the Government to make important alterations in the regulations under which fishing is carried on in Lake Ellesmere, in the Canterbury District.

As I was unable to see you a day or two since, when I called at your office, I think it desirable to put on paper certain considerations which I trust may induce the Government to pause before agreeing to the applications which have been made to them.

It is, I believe, urged that the decrease in the size of the flounder taken in the lake is owing entirely to the fact that fish of 9in. in length may now be caught. It is desired by some persons that this size should be increased to 11in., and by some individuals even to 12in.

I have taken much trouble to acquire local information on this question, my constituents being largely interested in the matter, and your department possesses previous correspondence on the subject extending over a considerable period.

The men who are dependent on this fishery for the maintenance of themselves and their families are, as a rule, steady, law-abiding, and industrious persons, and their occupation is a very laborious one. They are thrifty, and have gradually accumulated sufficient funds to acquire boats and nets, and are settled with their families on the shores of the lake.

To interfere with the fishing to the extent proposed, while it is unnecessary, and would fail to attain the object said to be in view, would practically put a stop to the industry, and throw hard-working colonists and their families on the world without a living. They are mostly persons of foreign origin, accustomed to fishing from their infancy, and would find it now a matter of difficulty—especially in the present state of the labour-market—to maintain themselves by other means. They appeal to me to represent their case to the Government, and earnestly hope that no steps may be taken at the instance of individuals who are said to be in some cases interested, and in others mere theorists ignorant of the circumstances, without a full inquiry being made by practical men and competent judges.

I enclose a letter from one of the fishermen, writing on behalf of his companions, stating facts which are well worthy of consideration.

I believe it would be found that any diminution which may have taken place in the size of the fish now found in the lake is owing largely to other reasons than the size of the meshes of the nets. Among other causes is the fact that Lake Ellesmere is now let out much more frequently than it used to be, with a view chiefly to the protection of the Little River railway-line. The consequence is that the water is generally shallower and warmer; and also that the large-sized fish are in larger numbers than formerly swept by the outflowing current into the sea, from which they never return. A diminution in the quantity of the fish is also due to the fact that the outlet of the lake is made through the shingle-bank at a spot which is a favourite spawning-place. On a former occasion I explained the effect of this proceeding, and endeavoured to prevail on the Government to open the lake at another spot; but this would have involved some increased expense, which the Railway Commissioners did not see their way to incur.

The fishermen are very reasonable; they would agree to the size up to which flounders may be taken being increased to 10in., and they have already expressed their readiness to have the fishing properly looked after by an Inspector, and even to pay a moderate license-fee towards providing a salary for him.

My earnest request to the Government on behalf of these men is that, without a full and fair inquiry being held, at which they may be heard, nothing may be done which would injure them most seriously, and probably throw them on the hands of the Government as unemployed. You will see from the letter which I have enclosed that they are prepared to afford every possible facility for such an inquiry.

This question has now been before the Government for some years without being dealt with. It is of so large importance to a considerable body of men that I trust the present Government will give their early and serious attention to it.

The Hon. the Minister of Marine.

I have, &c.,

JOHN HALL.