

MARINE FISH HATCHERY AND BIOLOGICAL STATION, PORTOBELLO

SIR,—

I have the honour to submit, for the information of the Hon. the Minister of Marine, a report on the Portobello Marine Fish Hatchery and Biological Station for the year ended 31st March, 1950.

This station was established nearly fifty years ago under section 65 of Part I of the Fisheries Act, 1908, which made provision for "the establishment of fish-breeding or fish-hatcheries," a form of enterprise which, so far as marine fish culture was concerned, had originated in America and Europe, its pioneers and advocates possessing more enthusiasm for undertakings of "practical" value than understanding of the actual biological conditions governing such matters. Experience has since shown the impracticability of such undertakings, and the development of marine biological science has provided an explanation of the reasons for their fruitlessness. In the case of the Portobello establishment the relatively enlightened outlook of the first Chairman of its Board of Management, the Hon. G. M. Thomson, resulted in the recognition of the value of this station as a means of providing for the study of marine life in addition to its primary object of artificial fish hatching and the acclimatization of exotic species in New Zealand waters. For many years our only knowledge regarding the life-histories of fishes and other forms of life in New Zealand seas was the result of researches carried out at Portobello. Results could have been greatly augmented but for the fact that the financial provision for staff and equipment has never been adequate for anything like the full use of the potential facilities available at Portobello. In this branch of science New Zealand's progress has been far behind that of other British Commonwealth nations and most other civilized countries. The most apparent reason for this is that the actual control, by way of financial appropriations, of work that could be done at Portobello has been subject to the annual estimates of a department the interests and functions of which were statutorily based mainly on the administrative tasks connected with the operations of the fishing industry. The fact that effective and permanently beneficial administrative control of the fishing industry must be based on a scientific understanding of conditions of life in the sea has been all too slow in receiving recognition.

During the last twenty-five years in which fishery investigational work has been undertaken, quite appropriately and indeed inevitably (though not as extensively as was desirable), by the Marine Department the only work carried on at Portobello that has advanced scientific knowledge of sea life has been done by members of the staff and research students of Otago University or by occasional visitors from other University colleges or from overseas. The transference of the administration of the Portobello Station to an authority that is responsible for the furtherance of scientific research that is fundamental or general, as distinct from investigations for immediately practical purposes, is a development that would appear to be logical and appropriate at this stage. For this reason the Board is in favour of the proposal to hand over the Station into the charge of the University of Otago, whose members of staff have borne a considerable share in the duties of management as well as carrying out noteworthy research work through many difficult years. It is understood that steps to this end are now in train.

During the past year much use has been made of the Station by the Botany and Zoology Departments of the University, and in August, 1949, a short marine course was held for students. Dr. Margaret Naylor, marine algologist from England, who is temporarily a member of the Botany Department, has been the only overseas visitor.

Thanks to a generous grant from the University of Otago, much needed repairs to the aquarium building and one of the dwellings have been carried out. The Board is pleased to report that the station is now in a better condition than has been the case for several years.

I have, &c.,

A. E. HEFFORD,

Chairman of the Board.