

Mr. FRANK KEENAN, Outside Fisherman.

The outside fishing-ground extends from Cape Saunders to Shag Point. We go ten miles from Otago Heads, and get groper, red-cod, ling, barracouta, kingfish—all by line fishing. The trawlers are injuring my fishing. I have been ten years fishing, but the last two or three years the fish have been terribly scarce. We used to be able to get plenty of fish near Otago Heads, but we must go further off the land now. This year we had to go much further than in other years, and the supply has been shorter. Trawling over the ground where the fish feed is disturbing the fish. The limit should be fixed outside our fishing-grounds. If trawling had to be given up it would not injuriously affect the fishing trade. The fishing-boats could supply all the fish required. The small boats are quite capable of supplying the market with fish.

Mr. JOHN MALCOLM, Outside Fisherman.

In the first place, I would like to ask you, sir, if you could give us any idea as to the trawling limits of the Old Country. I can refer you back about fifty years in my native place, Scotland, where fishermen are fishing much as we are here now off Otago Heads. They were, of course, fishing on a different system from that in use here. They used the long line, where we use the hand-line here. They used to go from five to twenty miles off the land, sometimes keeping closer. They used to bring in handsome loads of fish, and made a comfortable living. I have been fishing here for twenty-eight years, more or less, and now I am told by good authorities that owing to the trawlers going over that ground there are now no fish on it, and that these men are all over the water. Now, taking the ground around Otago Heads altogether, we think that if the limit is not put on these trawlers we should be in the same position as those in the Old Country. My comrades here will bear me out on that point. If a trawler goes over the bottom it disturbs the whole bottom, and it picks up all the small fish that other fish are living on. For every fish they take ashore they kill five. I am prepared to say that if you can bear with me you will find my words to be a fact. Many years ago the boats used to keep the market more than supplied, and they have done it all along. They were limited very often perhaps to two dozen a day. They could take in perhaps thirty or forty barracouta, and two dozen groper. I consider that if a limit is not put on these trawlers outside of a head-line we shall have no fish. The trawlers disturb the bottom. That is the reason. The decrease the last four years is very marked. Sometimes there is a decrease in cod, but we always get enough to supply the market. I consider that fishing in New Zealand is only in its infancy. There is a season when we lose the groper altogether, and there is a season when we lose barracouta altogether. The deepest of the banks off Otago Heads is only about from 25 to 30 fathoms. If the fish are spawning they seek shallow water at this time, and if the trawlers are working near they must disturb them. I observed, on the 3rd of last month, that one of these trawlers dropped a trawl about 2 or 3 chains off the land, and for about four miles he was within a chain of the rocks. He then lifted his trawl, and put it down again about a mile off the land, right on the banks where we used to get the fish. Now, these trawlers working along the shore are preventing the fish from getting into the rivers and bays. The decrease may be owing to the heavy weather we have had, for I have little doubt that there are fish on the coast.

Mr. JOHN H. TUNNAGE.

About seven years ago there was a decrease here in the barracouta, but next season it came in thicker. Since the trawlers had been working nine miles north we have not had any groper whatever, and that was one of our chief fishing-grounds at this time of the year. I have been here all my life. I have observed the supply of fish that has been brought in for a long time. The trawlers are doing a great deal of harm. They kill the small fish and the feed, and they keep in right amongst us. One fisherman when lying at anchor had his anchor nearly taken up by a trawl. The Moeraki season comes in so much earlier than ours does.

Mr. EDWARD NELSON, Inside Fisherman.

I have been fishing eighteen years, and I have been seine fishing nearly all that time from the Port to the Heads. I sometimes go round Blueskin Bay. At times flounders have been very scarce, and at others they come in very plentifully. I have never seen a season like this one, or only once perhaps, and that was about twenty years ago, five or six weeks before Christmas. We have always made a living until now. Since the trawlers started we rarely get a sole. We used to get six and eight dozen, now we cannot get one. The supply of flounders has kept pretty well inside, but we never see moki. I think it quite necessary to put a limit to the trawlers. Altering the mesh of the net would lessen the destruction of the small fish. For the last ten years there has been a decrease in flounders. There are no more seiners than there were fifteen years ago. Mr. Sullivan has ruined the Dunedin market. He is selling fish by auction. The trawlers bring in a lot of fish, and of course he has it in his own hands and sells it before he comes into town at any price on the station. When he spoils the living of one hundred and fifty men what are we going to do? The trawlers bring down prices in the summer time. The small fishermen are quite capable of supplying the Dunedin market and district. I indorse all that is said about the trawler limit.

Mr. MALCOLM.

It seems to be the opinion of all the fishermen here that a limit of five miles should be for a start. Our forefathers made a limit in the Old Country of five miles of a start, and, as far as I can understand from a good authority from the Old Country, it is now sometimes from fifteen to seventy. I suggest Papanui because it would be a better line from there to Shag Point than to the Cape, because it lies further out. I am fully of opinion that if immediate steps are not taken all the seine-men (over two hundred) will be knocked out of employment. There are twenty-seven outside boats and crafts, with two or three men in each of them.