

SIR,—

Wellington, 11th October, 1912.

With regard to the condition of the blue-cod fishing-grounds in different parts of the Dominion and the size-limit at which these fish should be allowed to be taken, I have to say that I find it almost impossible to get reliable information from fishermen and others interested in the fishing industry with regard to the actual condition of the fishing-grounds, size of fish obtained, &c., the information being always more or less biased in favour of the interests of the person making them.

As you are aware, for some years past frequent complaints have come in from various parts of the Dominion regarding the decrease in the supply of blue-cod from the fishing-grounds, and also with regard to the decrease in the average size of the fish marketed. You will see by the evidence given by the Stewart Island fishermen that most of them maintain that the old fishing-grounds off Half-moon Bay and some other parts yielded as many fish now as in former years. One witness (H. Hansen), however, admitted on being questioned that "there are hardly any fish on them"; and in this connection Mr. Tothill, one of the shareholders in the Pegasus Fishing Company, Stewart Island, made the statement to me at Invercargill that when the freezing plant was erected at Pegasus (about 1899) all the blue-cod they could handle was caught inside Pegasus Inlet. Now, these grounds have been depleted to such an extent for some years past as not to be worth fishing, and their men now fish the reefs outside out as far as the "Traps," and they find that in order to keep up a supply of fish they require to be continually on the lookout for new fishing-grounds.

All this goes to show the necessity for protecting these fisheries, and, as you will see, the fishermen admitted that some protection was necessary. In order to obtain more definite and reliable information regarding the actual condition of the blue-cod fisheries I purpose, with the permission of the Department, to visit the principal fishing-grounds before March and put in some time with the fishermen at each place. This appears to be the only way to arrive at the real condition of the blue-cod fisheries, and the protection which it is actually necessary to give them.

In the meantime I think it advisable to revoke the regulation gazetted on the 14th March, 1912, and fix a limit as recommended in the report furnished by Mr. McClure and myself.

I have, &c.,

The Secretary, Marine Department, Wellington.

L. F. AYSON,
Chief Inspector of Fisheries.