

Mr. A. D. Bayfield has been given a twelve months' license to prospect for ironsand on the foreshore between the Wanganui and Wairoa Rivers.

The General Harbour Regulations require vessels when in harbours to have on board a sufficient number of men at all times to perform the services required for the safety of the ships, unless the Harbourmaster gives a written exemption from this requirement. The Shipowners' Federation at Auckland asked that all vessels up to 100 tons should be exempted from this requirement, but the Department has not seen its way to alter the regulations to allow this. Vessels under 100 tons would be as much a danger to other ships as larger vessels should their lights go out and there be no one on board to relight them. It is therefore considered that the responsibility of granting exemptions should remain with Harbourmasters, who would know whether the vessels where they are moored would be in the way of other ships.

J. R. Sigley has been appointed signalman at Awakino, in place of W. J. R. Avery, resigned.

A contract has been let to Messrs. Stevenson and Cook, of Port Chalmers, to make and supply four iron buoys, and a contract to Messrs. Niven and Co. to make one large buoy.

The following prosecutions for offences in connection with harbours were instituted by the Department, viz.: J. Condon, for putting nightsoil into the Wairoa River, Kaipara—a fine of £5 and costs was imposed; E. Hapeta and R. Harris, for carrying passengers in unlicensed launches in Hokianga Harbour—the former was ordered to pay costs, and the latter was fined 10s. and costs; J. Johnson and J. Grogan, for taking shingle from the beach at Station Bay, Motutapu Island, without a license to do so—they were convicted and ordered to pay costs; J. Harrison, for depositing sand in Whangape Harbour—a fine of 10s. and costs was imposed; J. B. Andrewes, for towing an unlicensed pontoon with passengers on it in Hokianga Harbour—he was fined 1s. and costs; T. W. Baker, for running a launch without being licensed—a fine of 1s. and costs was imposed; E. Dixon, carrying more passengers than his license allowed—he was fined 5s. and costs.

The sum of £1,946 17s. 10d. has been collected for pilotage and port charges in respect of ports under the control of this Department, as compared with £1,860 during the previous year. A return showing the ports at which these charges were collected, and also the pilotage and port charges collected at ports under the control of Harbour Boards, is appended.

A return of harbour-works approved by the Governor in Council, and of the foreshore licenses issued, is appended. Plans of these works are submitted to the Marine Engineer for examination and for his report thereon before they are approved, and all foreshore licenses are gazetted. The examination, preparation of licenses, correspondence in connection therewith, and gazetting involve a great deal of work.

*Fisheries.*—The rock-oyster beds in the north which are worked by the Department were picked last season between the 1st May and the 31st July, and 4,782 sacks of oysters were picked and sold, a ready sale being found for them at 12s. 6d. a sack. The ordinary season within which they may be taken extends from the 1st May to the 31st October, but it was deemed advisable to close on the 31st July, so that the beds should not be overpicked. The amount received from the sales of those picked was £3,013 6s. 8d., and the expense of picking and selling was £2,447 7s. 7d., so that a profit of £565 19s. 1d. was made. Owing to the heavy demand a higher price could easily have been obtained, but it is the desire of the Department to sell them at such a price as will place them within the reach of all, and to sell them direct to consumers so far as this can be done. Last season it was found that, owing to the limited supply, some dealers who could not obtain all they wanted were arranging with individuals to purchase at the Department's depot ostensibly for themselves but really for dealers, to whom they resold at a higher price. If it is found that this practice continues, the Department will arrange to deliver them itself at the houses for which purchasers say they are bought, and, if this does not stop the practice, other steps will be taken.

The profit from the sale of the oysters is being used to replant the beds which were destroyed by overpicking and indiscriminate picking before the Department took over the picking and sale. During the last two years replanting has been done on the Coromandel coast at Huieh, Kepuki, Rabbit, and Green Islands, Kirita Bay, south shore of Coromandel Harbour, and from Coromandel South Head to Mania Head; and I strongly recommend the continuance of the replanting of other depleted areas.

Recently some persons were found illegally taking oysters from the replanted beds. They were prosecuted and fined, but in most of the prosecutions for poaching oysters the fines imposed are too low to have much of a deterrent effect. When the Fisheries Act is next amended, it would, in my opinion, be wise to make provision for a higher minimum fine for taking oysters from replanted beds than is already provided for in the case of oyster-beds generally.

The Foveaux Strait beds yielded a sufficient supply of oysters last season to meet requirements, although they were in rather poor condition early in the season. Of the quantity taken, 266,192 dozen, valued at £2,057, were exported to Australia. Experience having shown that the oysters have not fully recovered condition by the 1st February, it was decided to alter the open season, which had been from the 1st February to the 30th September, and to make it from the 1st March to the 31st October. This has accordingly been done.

On several occasions fish caught from steamers, especially when waiting for the tide outside bar harbours, have been sold, although the steamers are not licensed as fishing-boats. This is a breach of the law, and is unfair to fishermen who have to take out licenses for their boats. As a warning, proceedings are now being taken against a person for doing this.

It is to be regretted that the municipalities have not so far established fish-markets, but I understand that the Wellington City Council is moving in the matter. I am convinced that the establishment of such markets would have a beneficial effect on the fishing industry, and would enable the public to get better and cheaper supplies of fish.

The report of Mr. Ayson, Chief Inspector of Fisheries, which is appended, gives full and detailed information concerning the fisheries.