

control. The manufacturers and packers of such lines as pearl-barley, condensed milk, jam, honey, treacle, golden syrup, Edmonds' baking-powder, starch, soap, candles, matches, canned fruits, and canned meats have been required, before raising prices, to submit full particulars to the Board to justify the increases proposed, and it is pleasing to be able to record that this scheme has worked without friction.

PETROL.

The scheme devised in July, 1918, for the equitable distribution of petrol, rationing if necessary, and fixation of price according to locality, worked well during a period of crisis. The Order in Council setting out the full scheme was published in the last annual report of the Board. From July to December, 1918, owing to insufficient supplies reaching the Dominion, great care had to be exercised in the distribution of petrol so as to conserve its use for essential needs. The administration of the regulations as to distribution was placed in the hands of the Department of Munitions and Supplies, and it is due to the officers of the Department to say that they carried out this difficult work with a minimum of friction.

In December last supplies of petrol coming to hand were such as to warrant the suspension of the regulations relating to quantities of petrol to be held by distributors and consumers, and action was taken accordingly. The Board feels that the step taken both in respect to distribution and restriction of price has given widespread satisfaction to consumers throughout the Dominion.

BACON AND HAMS.

The control of bacon and hams has continued. Up to February last an Order in Council fixed the maximum price of bacon and hams when sold by the manufacturers at the standard prices ruling on the 1st December, 1917. In consequence of complaints received that retailers were charging high prices as compared with the wholesale price, it was decided to fix the maximum retail price of bacon at 1s. 6d. per pound, save that when cut into rashers the retailers might add a sum not exceeding 1d. per pound to the above price. Provision was also made empowering the Board to authorize the retailer to exceed the above prices in cases in which by reason of the remoteness of the premises of the retailer from the source of supply, or by reason of any other special circumstances, the Board was satisfied that the above prices might reasonably be increased.

POTATOES.

On the 10th February, 1918, an Order in Council was gazetted prohibiting the export of potatoes. This action was apparently taken by the Department of Agriculture. Early in April the Prime Minister requested the Board to inquire into the price and supply of potatoes, and accordingly the Board was supplied by the Agricultural Department with statistics as to the position of the potato crop to ascertain whether the continuation of the embargo was warranted. These showed that potatoes were in short supply, and that the crops were not too promising. At this time (April, 1918) the main crop was not being dug. The quotations for prices wholesale were as follows: Melbourne, £13 10s. per ton; Sydney, up to £20 per ton; Lyttelton, up to £8 per ton; Auckland, up to £11 per ton; and all Dominion markets showed a tendency to rise. It appeared evident to the Board that if the embargo were removed the Dominion markets would reach prohibitive prices in sympathy with the Sydney market; and, furthermore, it appeared likely, from evidence available, that a shortage would ensue in the Dominion towards the end of the year; and as growers were obtaining from £7 to £7 10s. per ton f.o.b. Lyttelton, it was deemed advisable at that time not to remove the embargo. The Board took evidence in Auckland in March, 1919, and in Christchurch on the 3rd May last, and the general consensus of opinion was that, although there would be plenty of potatoes available for June and July, there would not be sufficient supplies later on available if unrestricted export were allowed. Later in the month, when digging was fairly forward, the Board decided on the statistics then available to recommend the raising of the embargo until the end of June, and later recommended that export be allowed up to the end of July.

FISH.

Very few complaints were received from consumers in connection with the price or the supply of fish. The Board has kept in close touch with the fishing industry throughout New Zealand. It is expected that now the war is over suitable equipment, which was most difficult to secure during the war period, will be available, thus ensuring larger supplies of fish. The freeing of the trawlers engaged in mine-sweeping operations will also materially increase supplies, and consequently it is expected that in some markets the prices to the general consumer will be reduced.

During the year a Commission was set up, under section 6 of the Cost of Living Act, 1915, to inquire into and report upon the following matters:—

- (1.) As to whether the price charged to the public for fish in Auckland is reasonable.
- (2.) As to whether the trawling-area of the Hauraki Gulf should be further restricted or further extended, and the reasons for the finding.
- (3.) Whether any limit has been imposed on fishermen, on their catches of fish, and the reason for such limit, if any.
- (4.) Whether it is possible to avoid taking fish below the size or weight prescribed by the Fishery Regulations in trawl-nets having a mesh of the prescribed size, and, if not, whether the size of mesh should be made larger; and, further, whether it should be made lawful to sell any undersized fish which may be taken in the authorized nets.

The Board of Trade delegated its powers in this connection to Messrs. C. C. Cutten, Magistrate, of Auckland (Chairman), J. H. Bradney, and T. Long.

The inquiry was duly held and a separate report issued.