

FISHERIES.

SIR,—

Wellington, 28th July, 1931.

I have the honour to submit my report for the year ended 31st March, 1931.

Failing the requisite legislative and financial provision for collecting data with the continuity and completeness necessary to afford a truly statistical record of the fishery, the information as to the vessels and men employed and the quantities of fish landed during the year has been obtained by the customary method of getting an annual return from local Inspectors of Fisheries. As has been previously pointed out, this method has many serious defects and gives a very inadequate representation of the character and productivity of the fisheries.

During the year an Order in Council has been gazetted (19th February, 1931) requiring owners of licensed fishing-vessels to make monthly returns of the quantities of fish landed; but the general operation of this Order is deferred owing to the lack of staff to carry out the necessary work of collecting and collating the records.

The information obtained from the various fishing centres has been tabulated as shown in Tables I to V appended to this report. The estimated total quantity of wet fish (including whitebait) landed in the Dominion for the year was 370,766 cwt., valued at £418,726. The total amount is somewhat higher than the figure for last year (367,647 cwt.), but this is due to the fact that the collection of returns has been a little more comprehensive. The total value for wet fish landed shows an appreciable drop—from £449,440 to £418,726.

The data provided by the returns sent in are too heterogenous to admit of any rational analysis, but on the basis of our general information it may be said that increases of production in some areas are more or less balanced by decreases from others. The decline in value is to be ascribed to a falling-off in demand for fish, arising out of the general economic conditions.

The following summary shows the total production from the New Zealand fishing industry for the year :—

	Quantity.					Value.
						£
Wet fish .. .. .	..	..	..	..	369,346 cwt.	406,675
Whitebait* .. .. .	..	..	..	..	1,420 cwt.	12,051
Dredge oysters .. .. .	..	..	..	..	42,744 sacks	26,715
Rock-oysters .. .. .	..	..	..	..	5,215 sacks	6,258
Mussels .. .. .	..	..	..	..	6,224 sacks	2,039
Crayfish .. .. .	..	..	..	..	2,730 cwt.	4,733
Toheroas (canned products) .. .. .	..	..	..	..	750 cwt.	4,204
Whale products—						
Oil .. .. .	..	..	..	..	340 tons }	8,147
Fertilizer .. .. .	..	..	..	..	80 tons }	
Quinnat salmon (netted fish only) .. .. .	..	..	..	..	9,427 lb.	354
Total value .. .. .	..	..	..	..		<u>£471,176</u>

\* Partial return. Total would be considerably higher.

Arising out of the necessity for patrolling the State-owned oyster-beds and beaches in the Auckland District, we have here a staff of departmental Inspectors of Fisheries, and it is thus possible to obtain information about the general fisheries which is gathered from systematic local observations and inquiry. The data are not so useful for the purposes of annual reports as they would be if collected at intervals throughout the year in accordance with a statistical scheme, such as was recommended in last year's report. The annual totals of fish-landings for Auckland are collected from the fish-depots of the port, and the figures representing the sum total may be regarded as satisfactorily approximating to accuracy.

The total landings of fish at Auckland—104,098 cwt., valued at £88,947—show an increase of approximately 8·7 per cent. in quantity and 12·3 per cent. in value over the corresponding amounts for the previous year, but do not approach the peak figures (134,040 cwt., value £119,482) shown for the year 1927–28.

As in the previous year, the Auckland steam-trawlers divided their operations between the lower Hauraki Gulf, off the Great Barrier Island, the Bay of Plenty, and the west coast. The full utilization of the western grounds is not only handicapped by more adverse weather, but is discouraged by the inferior market value of the big snapper obtained on these grounds as compared with the medium-sized fish of the Hauraki Gulf.

Except when bad weather interfered with the operations of the Danish-seining and line-fishing launches, the fishing in the Hauraki Gulf was fairly consistently good, some of the Danish-seine catches at times approaching the quantities seen in the early years of this method of fishing. In the snapper “schooling” season several of the seiners took to long-line fishing with good results, but the fish thus caught were of bigger size than is in most demand in the Auckland markets.

The dab and flounder fishing on the “Dab Patch” in the mouth of the Thames Firth was good, but not so productive as last year.

In spring and summer, with the onset of warm weather, there is normally a decline in the demand for fish, but this year the market for fish was weaker than usual, owing to the bad times and to the decreased price of meat. This condition applies generally to the whole of the Dominion.