

REPORT ON FISHERIES FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31st MARCH, 1932.

SIR,—

I have the honour to submit the following report on fisheries for the past year :—

With regard to statistics, the most important subject to be dealt with in an annual fisheries report, an attempt has been made to improve upon the records previously published by showing in the summary table (p. 32) the quantities of different kinds of fish landed at different ports. The returns sent in have not permitted more than a partial classification in Table IIA, and about half the total quantity of fish landed is included under the heading of "mixed" and "kind not specified."

Means are still unfortunately lacking for obtaining records of the landings of individual vessels from which statistics could be compiled showing the quantities of the chief kinds of fish caught by the different methods of fishing.

The total quantity of wet fish landed during the year was 318,956 cwt., valued at £311,199.

Compared with the figures for the previous years, this shows a reduction in quantity of 14 per cent., a reduction entirely explicable by the reduced purchasing-power of the public which restricted market requirements, and in very many cases resulted in catches being voluntarily limited by the fishermen themselves. The decline in value from £406,675 for 1930-31 to £311,199 in 1931-32, a diminution of 23·5 per cent., is a more significant feature than the reduction in quantity.

While the prevalence of unemployment and straitened finances diminished the demand and brought down the price of fish in the established channels of trade, it led to increased numbers of people taking up fishing in a casual semi-professional way. The catches made by such fishermen, generally speaking, were not taken into account in the returns from which the figures for this report are compiled, but they would not alter the total very appreciably, though such operations to some extent added to the difficulties of the established members of the industry. Cases have been reported where fishermen found the expenses of their operations too heavy for the returns obtained and had to abandon fishing and take to relief work.

An estimate of the total production of the Dominion fisheries for the year is given in the following summary :—

	Quantity.	Value. £
Wet fish	318,956 cwt.	311,199
Whitebait	2,941 cwt.	32,715
Dredge oysters	36,538 sacks	22,836
Rock-oysters	4,360 sacks	5,014
Mussels	4,242 sacks	1,294
Crayfish	2,083 cwt.	2,650
Toheroas (canned products)	257 cwt.	2,400
Whale products—		
Oil	530 tons	6,000 (estimated)
Fertilizer	74 tons	
Quinnat salmon (netted fish only)	15,337 lb.	760
Total value		<u>£385,868</u>

The corresponding total value of fishery products for the preceding year was £471,176.

Auckland, the most important fishing centre in the Dominion, shows a decline of 19·5 per cent. in the quantity and 22·4 per cent. in the value of fish landed compared with last year. Though all fishing interests have suffered a serious setback, trawling, on account of its higher working-expenses, was the branch of the local fishing industry most affected by the economic depression. Whereas in the 1930-31 year four trawlers were working continuously and one trawler operated for part of the year, during the twelve months under review three trawlers were engaged in the first five months; the number was reduced to two in September, and for January and February all were laid up except one. Their fishing operations were carried on mainly in the Bay of Plenty and in the outer portion of the Hauraki Gulf, this method of fishing being prohibited on the nearer grounds of the Gulf. Trawled fish thus constituted a smaller proportion of the Auckland supplies than usual. So far as snapper and flounder were concerned, except when they were held up by bad weather, the Danish-seiners' catches were more than adequate to make up for the deficiency arising from the curtailed trawling operations. It is to be regretted that I cannot here give a more detailed study of the effects of this change in relation to the fish stocks on the one hand and the economic factors on the other hand. The latter, being of more immediate human concern, naturally controlled the situation. From the point of view of fishery administration, however, the effect of fishing operations on the stock and on the prospects of future supplies is of most essential importance. It is difficult to gauge the condition of the fishing-grounds as regards productivity from the quantities landed, for the reason that for the greater part of the year all the boats were "put on a limit" by the fish-distributing agencies, and certainly did not bring in so much fish as they would have done if there had been a demand for all they could get. The flounder and dab fishing, prosecuted by Danish-seiners off the entrance to the Thames Firth, off the north coast of Waiheke, and off the western shore, was particularly good; and it would appear that the quantities of these flatfish have recently increased. Snapper supplies, though usually more than sufficient to meet the market demand, do not appear in such promising light since for the best catches it was necessary to exploit grounds further afield.

Largely due to the increased supplies of dabs and flounders, especially in the spring season, the Thames fleet had a fairly successful year so far as catches were concerned, though the prices were