

From returns submitted by local Inspectors of Fisheries the statement given below has been prepared.

*Whitebait Fishery.*

Inspector's Centre.	Rivers fished.	Method of Fishing.	Fishing began	Best Month.	Number of Fishermen.		Total Quantity caught.
					Whole Time.	Part Time.	
			1931.				Cwt.
Auckland ..	Lower Waikato ..	Hand-net ..	28th June	September ..	120	50	1,181
Napier ..	Tukutuki, Ngaruroro, Wairoa	Set-nets ..	July ..	November ..	50	30	58
New Plymouth	Mokau, Waitara, Mohokatina, Tongaporutu	Hand and set nets	September	Mid September to mid October	(?)	(?)	68
Foxton ..	Manawatu ..	Set-nets ..	July ..	October ..	..	70	86
Blenheim ..	Wairau, Opaawa, Omaka, Tuamarina Stream, Spring Creek	(?)	Early in October	September ..	(?)	(?)	17 (approx.)
Greymouth ..	Grey River, Teremakau	Hand-nets ..	Mid August	Mid October to mid November	20	200	246
Hokitika ..	Hokitika, Teremakau, Mahinapua, Totara, Arahura, Waitaha, Three-mile, Mihinui	Set and hand nets (trenches)	September	October and first part of November	216	250	360
Matainui, South Westland	Big Wanganui, Poerua, Wataroa, Okuru, Haast, Maori, Jacobs River	Set and hand nets	September	End of October and early November	32	6	446
Christchurch..	Styx, Ashley, Avon, Waimakariri	Hand and set nets	August	November ..	300	(?)	73
Dunedin ..	Taieri, Clutha, Wai-kouaiti, Shag	Hand-nets ..	September	October ..	(?)	(?)	355
Invercargill ..	Mataura, Oreti, Makarewa, Aparima, Waihopu	Hand-nets ..	September	October to November	..	100	51
Totals ..	..	..	..	..	..	..	2,941 cwt. (approx.)

It will be understood from the foregoing remarks that these returns do not constitute a complete record of the produce of this fishery, nor is it possible to give its approximate total value. The 2,941 cwt. of whitebait given as the total yield of the principal whitebaiting rivers would have an average wholesale value of, say, two shillings per pound, or about £11 per cwt., so that the total value would be not less than £32,000. During the year 66,386 lb. of canned whitebait was exported, valued for Customs purposes at £7,459.

The productiveness of whitebait-fishing is much affected by the weather, and it may be said with truth that the heavy rains of spring and the resultant flooded rivers have done more than anything to conserve our whitebait stocks. In the 1931 season the fishery on the west coast of the South Island was considerably hampered by floods and the catches were below average. A report from Marlborough, on the other hand, states that the catches were much below normal, perhaps owing to very dry weather. The Manawatu River is said to have had the best season for many years. The Tutaekuri and Esk Rivers in Hawke's Bay have been affected (probably through loss of spawning-grounds) by the raising of their beds by the great earthquake of 1931. The whitebait runs in the season following showed a great reduction below normal. It is stated that they were also probably affected by more than usual snow-water.

The whitebait fisheries as a whole, though varying considerably from year to year owing to natural causes, have undoubtedly shown a general decline in every succeeding decade since the earlier years of settlement. Overfishing, drainage, cultivation, and stocking of lands and the predations of such introduced fish as trout have each in some degree contributed to this reduction, and there is urgent need, before it is too late, to throw light on the extent and significance of each of these factors. The discovery of the peculiar circumstances connected with spawning of the species has already provided a solution to one problem of first importance. This knowledge should be acted upon and measures taken not only for the protection of known spawning-grounds, but also for the restoration or creation of other grounds where conditions are naturally suitable. It is very much to be regretted that the state of the Department's finances has not permitted the extension of the work of locating spawning-places to all the more important whitebait waters of the Dominion, nor to carry into practice the recommendations previously made for the protection of those spawning-places which are now known.

Up to about two years ago the Department possessed no knowledge at all as to the natural propagation of whitebait, and a somewhat vague and sketchy understanding of the exploitation of this fishery. While our understanding of the natural history of the species has taken a considerable step forward, our surveillance of the human operations, which involve not increase but decrease of the whitebait supplies, remains very imperfect and unsatisfactory. It is the job of the Fisheries Department to control and regulate the fisheries. It must first acquire the necessary knowledge or