

REPORT ON FISHERIES FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31st MARCH, 1939.

SIR,—

The annual report on fisheries submitted this year is based on a better supply of statistical data than has previously been possible. This is a matter for satisfaction, because sound and adequate fishery statistics provide not only a serial record of production, but also the information that is most necessary for a proper understanding of the condition of the fisheries as regards their soundness or unsoundness from the conservational point of view. Their interest and value tend to increase as time goes on, rendering possible comparisons between results shown for a series of years. In order that such comparisons may be truly significant and productive of reliable conclusions it is necessary that the data to be compared should have reference to factors that can be measured up with some approximation to accuracy and constancy. Endeavours are being made to improve the collection of data and the form in which they are published in order that this object may be achieved as early as possible. It is not sufficient, for instance, to show, as was the case up to a few years ago, that approximately a certain total weight of snapper was landed at a certain port in a certain year. It is also necessary to show what quantities were caught by the various methods of fishing employed, and it is further very desirable to indicate what amount of fishing-power and what amount of fishing-time were spent in the catching thereof. There are still gaps and imperfections in our collected data that one would like to see remedied. One can only claim that each year sees some progress towards the perfection that is our objective.

The statement which follows gives the estimated total quantity and value of the principal classes of fishery products marketed during the year :—

	Quantity.	Value. £
Wet fish	356,114 cwt.	424,643
Whitebait	3,053 cwt.	25,204
Oysters (dredged)	67,243 sacks	48,751
Oysters (rock)	4,870 sacks	6,696
Mussels	12,869 sacks	3,245
Crayfish	9,255 cwt.	11,031
Toheroa (canned products)	69,560 lb.	3,696
Whale oil	400 tons	8,000
Quinnat salmon (netted fish only)	10,727 lb.	536
Total value		<u>£531,802</u>

Comparing this summary with the totals shown for the various classes last year, one finds that the total landings of wet fish have remained at an almost unchanged level, the quantity having increased by 0·1 per cent. and the total value by 2·7 per cent. The total catches of whitebait show a very slight decline, but the decrease by 58 cwt. from the estimated total for the 1937 season cannot be considered significant owing to the imperfection of our data on this fishery (see p. 25). Dredge-oyster supplies present a still further increase of 856 sacks, or 1·3 per cent., over last year's record figure of 66,387 sacks, the value having increased by 15·2 per cent. (see p. 46). The yield of the Auckland rock-oyster fishery has also increased from 4,203 sacks (or 12,609 bushels) to 4,870 sacks (or 14,610 bushels) (see p. 46). The total quantity of mussels marketed has increased by 73·6 per cent. Crayfish, however, show a decline of 24·2 per cent. in the total weight and 7·8 per cent. in total value. Toheroa products are above last year's output in total weight but show a less value. A record whaling season in Marlborough Sounds raised the whale-oil production from 280 tons to 400 tons, but the fertilizer obtained from this source was negligible. The catches from quinnat-salmon netting in the Waimakariri increased from 6,236 lb. to 10,727 lb., the estimated total value being 72 per cent. higher than for the catches made in the previous season.

FISHING-VESSELS.

The nature and numerical strength of the fishing-fleet at each port is indicated in Table I (p. 41). The total number of fishing-vessels licensed during the official year was 1,213, exceeding the number in the previous year by 70. The total value of the New Zealand fishing-fleet is estimated at £447,372, or with the value of fishery gear added, £495,771.

The number of steam-vessels licensed decreased from 24 to 21; motor-vessel licenses increased from 813 to 854, and row-boats from 306 to 338.

An analysis, according to size-classes and manner of propulsion, of the vessels licensed for fishing in the past year is given below. The numbers in brackets are those for the previous year :—

Length (overall).	Steam-vessels.	Motor-vessels.	Row-boats.	Total.
Under 15 ft. .. .. .	..	22 (22)	169 (155)	191 (177)
15 ft. to 25 ft. .. .. .	..	236 (204)	169 (151)	405 (355)
26 ft. to 35 ft. .. .. .	..	365 (352)	..	365 (352)
36 ft. to 45 ft. .. .. .	..	185 (191)	..	185 (191)
Over 45 ft.	21 (24)	46 (44)	..	67 (68)
Totals	21 (24)	854 (813)	338 (306)	1,213 (1,143)

Of the licensed fishing-vessels, 150 did not engage in fishing at all, and 237 fished for less than five months of the year.