

leasing portions of the oyster-beds for a period of years—though there would not be much difficulty in buoying off the respective areas, and though for such exclusive rights the rents might realize a good sum, I question whether the real object, that of keeping clean the beds during the close months, would be attained unless a strict supervision was established to enforce dredging during those months. The system of grants of sea bottom and foreshore to private individuals and companies for oyster cultivation, under conditions of forfeiture if not usefully employed, has met with the approval of the Parliamentary Committee before alluded to, and in France it is very generally and largely adopted. But I question whether in either country the sea bottom leased for the purpose lies at so great a depth and so far out to sea as at Stewart Island—two important considerations as affecting the question of expense in working. However, the experiment might be tried as regards portions of some of the deserted beds already referred to. With proper periodical inspection, and a condition that an unfavourable report would lead to the determination of the grant, the experiment might prove successful and lead to valuable results.

25. *Second Proposition: Offering Premiums for Cleaning Beds.*—The second plan, that of offering a premium for all dog-whelks, star-fish, five-fingers, and Echinidæ or sea-urchins dredged off the beds and brought on shore, is one which prevails amongst private lessees of oyster-beds and companies in England. Mr. James Wiseman, in his evidence before the Committee so often alluded to, in reply to the question, “Whether it is necessary to give strict orders to destroy dog-whelks, &c., in dredging?” says, “Yes; so much so that each of the men receive 1s. for a bucket (which is a small measure) for all the dog-whelks they destroy. Nothing is given to them for destroying five-fingers; but they are capital manure, so that they save them and take them on shore for their gardens.” This system of premiums might be tried. It is possible that during the close season the fishermen, having nothing for their cutters to do, might be willing to dredge for small remuneration; but care must be taken that they do not carry off the oysters to shore as well as the vermin. It has this advantage: that while the dredger gets paid for destroying only two or three of the oyster’s enemies, he destroys a number of others, inanimate as well as animate, such as sea-weed, ordinary weeds, mud, &c.—in fact, cleans the bed at a cheap rate.

26. *Third Proposal: Government to undertake the Cleaning.*—The third proposition, that of Government cutters with responsible crews, would be the best and surest way of combating the evil; for while probably such would be the most directly expensive, it would prove ultimately to be the cheapest, as being the most thorough in the execution of the work. I have no doubt the dredgers during the close season would gladly let out their cutters, or work by contract, to clean the beds; but some responsible person should be on board each cutter to see that they did the work completely. That cleaning the beds constantly is life to the oyster, and leaving them dirty, a prey to their enemies, death, has been proved by the experience of Great Britain and France, in which latter country the regulations for enforcing dredging for cleaning are very stringent. Prolific as the oyster is, experience has proved it can be exterminated more rapidly than it can breed.

27. *Exhaustion of Beds in Australia.*—In Tasmania, Adelaide, and Victoria, the oyster has long become a thing of the past, on which memory may feast itself. In New South Wales also it is rapidly approaching that interesting stage when it may be mentioned as a recent bereavement; while in New Zealand it will share a similar fate as population increases, unless stringent measures are at once adopted to prevent it.

28. *Port Adventure.*—The Port Adventure oyster may be considered a first-class oyster. Its shell is thin, deep, and not too large, the proportion of meat to shell being greater than in the deep-sea oyster. In delicacy of flavour, it is superior either to the deep-sea oyster here or to any I have tasted in Australia, resembling much the pure Home native. The beds in this locality were at one time singularly prolific, and lying in shallow water, varying from one to two fathoms, could be worked by hand and a “dogrel” or small net fixed at the end of a pole. As I have mentioned in my report on Stewart Island, addressed to the Provincial Secretary, Dunedin, of the 23rd January, 1875, a cutter of 18 tons sailed into Oyster Cove, Port Adventure, and filled up in a very short space of time by shovelling the oysters up into the hold. The Maoris, many of whom lived at that time at the Maori Reserve in the port, used to fill their boats in a similar manner. Easily obtained, the beds were being rapidly exhausted, when in July, 1872, they were, on my recommendation, closed against dredging. They have remained so now for five years, and yet I do not find that they have increased to anything like the extent which might naturally have been anticipated, the reason being, I believe, that the beds are covered with an accumulation of dirt, sea-weed, and vermin, the result of having remained so long undisturbed. I examined them in 1875, and also in February of this year, and each time I noticed both in Oyster Cove and Heron River—where the best beds are situated—an amount of sea-weed which could not have been healthy for the oysters, and a singularly large quantity of oyster culch or dead shells, showing a mortality which can only be accounted for by the supposition that the star-fish or five-fingers and dog-whelk have been holding high revel for years, while the absence of brood or small oysters on the culch was remarkable. The ground in Port Adventure must, from the description given, resemble that in the Basin of Arcachon, Isle de Re, and Gulf of La Fosse de Loix, in France, where the artificial cultivation of oysters is carried on with such success, and therefore should be treated in a similar manner—that is, the beds should be leased to individuals, to be farmed under restrictions securing a proper cultivation. In Oyster Cove, at a rough estimate, there are about 112 acres of sea bottom at a depth of from one to two fathoms, a portion of which is uncovered for a few hours at low spring tides. In Abraham Bay there are 114 acres, and in Heron River about 234 acres. This bottom, at one time covered with oysters, I would recommend to be leased by auction in such lots and for such a term of years as may be determined on careful inquiry. The lessee to forfeit his lease if, on inspection by the Government, it is found that he is denuding it too largely, neglecting to keep it clean, or breaking any of the conditions of the Oyster Fisheries Act. To throw these beds open for the public to work means simply utter destruction in one year. Having been kept out of Port Adventure so long, the fishermen will take care to work the oyster-beds so thoroughly that it would not be worth while to close them again. To let them continue closed would also be injurious, as in reality it is preserving the