

spades, which reckless operation cleared away the small with the marketable oysters. In order to prevent this, an Order in Council has been made providing that no spade or other apparatus for taking rock-oysters shall be used of which the edge or blade shall exceed 2 inches in width. An Order in Council was also made under the provisions of "The Fisheries Encouragement Act, 1885," prohibiting the exportation of rock-oysters from the colony. The great importance of conserving our oyster-beds, both rock and mud, cannot be more forcibly illustrated than by quoting from the report of the Royal Commission on the fisheries of Tasmania in 1883, which shows that whereas, in one of the best years, the number of oysters dredged from the principal native beds amounted to 22,350,000, the value of which, at the present current prices, would be £93,125, a sum which, it is stated, is more than the equivalent of the value of the exports of grain, hay, flour, and bran from Tasmania in the three years previous to the date of the report, the yield of the beds has been reduced by over-fishing to not more than 100,000 per annum. The knowledge of this should be sufficient to induce the Government here to so regulate the taking of oysters as to prevent the productiveness of our beds from being arrested or destroyed from the same cause. The quantity of oysters exported from New Zealand—chiefly to Sydney and Melbourne—during the year ended the 31st December last amounted to 1,057,760 dozen rock-oysters, valued at £3,333, and 170,455 dozen mud-oysters, valued at £2,196.

*Salt-water Fish.*—The department is at present collecting information on the habits, spawning-season, &c., of the edible fish inhabiting New Zealand waters, with a view of adopting and enforcing a close season for some of the fish. I trust to be able by next year to report more fully hereon. A trawl has been ordered from England for use on board one of the Government steamers for the purpose of ascertaining what kinds of fish can be procured on the various parts of the coast, and the best seasons for taking them.

*Fresh-water Fish.*—A shipment of whitefish-ova was received from America in February last, unfortunately in a putrid condition. These were forwarded through the courtesy of Professor Spencer Baird, the United States Commissioner of Fish and Fisheries. A shipment of salmon-ova was received by the s.s. "Ionic" in March last, and was distributed among certain acclimatization societies. I am glad to say that this shipment turned out a success—in fact, the most successful, I believe, hitherto received in the Australian Colonies. Some 200,000 ova were shipped; but only eight of the nine boxes arrived in good condition, one having to be left out of the ice-house prepared for the ova, there being no room for it. Notwithstanding this, some healthy fry were hatched out. I note that in Tasmania their most successful shipment of salmon-ova received by the "Yeoman," in 1885, yielded 36,000 fry out of 150,000 ova shipped—or 24 per cent.—whilst those ex "Ionic" yielded some 50 per cent. of healthy fry. The importation of this ova and the various steps that had to be taken in anticipation of, and after, their arrival in the colony were, as you are aware, carried out under the immediate directions of the Hon. Sir Julius Vogel, the Commissioner of Trade and Customs. The correspondence relating to the introduction of fish-ova has been printed, and will be presented to Parliament as a separate paper.

I would submit, for consideration, whether the present practice of placing the young salmon-fry in many different rivers is a judicious one. It would appear to be more desirable to place all the salmon-fry hatched into one particular river, that river being selected, regardless of position and district, as being the best salmon river, on account of the temperature of water and other necessary conditions. When once salmon are established in one river, it would be only a work of time to get them placed, at any rate, in most of the rivers in the Middle Island. In support of this plan, I quote the following paragraph from the United States Commission of Fish and Fisheries Report for 1883 on the subject of Artificial Propagation of Fish: "Failures have resulted, in a large degree, from the limited scale on which the work has been carried out. If the expectancy of destruction in a given locality be estimated as representing one million young fish, and any number less than one million be introduced therein, it is easy to understand that there will be no result." This opinion appears to apply with singular force to New Zealand, where several of the acclimatization societies are eager to secure a share of the young salmon in order that they may be turned out in rivers in various parts of the colony, some of which are entirely unfitted for the salmon to thrive, or, perhaps, even to live in.

Now that the Government have taken in hand the importation of fish-ova, I submit for consideration whether it would not be desirable, in the public interest, to make some inquiry as to the operations of acclimatization societies, especially in relation to pisciculture. So far as I can make out, there are no less than twenty-one such societies in the colony. All that appears to be requisite for the establishment of a society is, that a copy of its rules, signed by the chairman and countersigned by three members thereof, shall be deposited in the office of the Colonial Secretary. There is thus nothing to prevent any half-dozen persons from forming themselves into an acclimatization society in any district where no organization of that kind had already been constituted. It has, heretofore, been the practice, at the instance of any one of these societies, to make and gazette regulations under "The Salmon and Trout Act, 1867," for fishing in specified waters within the district in which such society operates. These regulations prescribe a fee, usually £1, for every fishing license. There is no specific authority in the Act for imposing this fee; this seems to have been done under the provisions in the Act quoted, which authorize the Governor to make such regulations for certain specified purposes as seem expedient, and also "as to any other matter or thing which in any manner relates to the management and protection of salmon or trout in this colony, or to the fishing for or taking salmon or trout." In some districts considerable amounts must be collected from the public for such licenses, and, as the license-fees are of the nature of a tax, I think it would be only reasonable in future to require that the accounts of societies which receive these fees should be published. I think it would also be reasonable for the Government in future to require any society which submits regulations for approval and publication to furnish, along with such regulations, a copy of its rules and a list of its members.

I understand that seven fish-hatcheries, belonging to acclimatization societies, are in existence now, viz., one each at Auckland, Wairarapa, Nelson, Christchurch, Dunedin, Wallacetown (Inver-