

*I. M. Patrey*, Frenchman: Has been fifteen years at Helensville, and fishes as far as South Head. He fishes in other parts of the harbour occasionally. He learnt fishing when young, on the north coast of France. Does not find the mullet are scarcer, but they vary in different seasons. They acquire the full growth of roe in January. Finds very few "milts," or male fish, in perfect roe at this time. Thinks the roe in the female fish takes two months to develop after it begins to swell. Cannot say when the fish are earliest, as at spawning-time, when it is hot weather we fish close to the market, and do not go down the harbour. Last year the mullet was in full roe very early, by the middle of December. They used to come up on the banks and edges of the rivers about Shelly Beach ("I thought to spawn"); but the last three years they have not done so, except a few at night. Supposes they must now spawn on banks nearer the Heads. The young fish are first seen about a month after the latest spawning. This is in March. They are then about 1 in. long. Thousands are to be seen in all the creeks between Shelly Beach and the Heads. At night one can hear them swarming when pulling the boat through them. They make a very peculiar sound, which cannot be mistaken. Small and big fish are not mixed up as a rule now. The little fish, larger than the fry, are still seen in millions up the river, but the big ones now keep more to the banks. Only uses set-nets, which have a 4 in. mesh, made of No. 12 hank twine. They are 6 ft. deep and 400 yards long, and are floated with corks. The nets are shot round the fish in half-circles, or sometimes a ring. The small ones escape, but the large ones are meshed in the gills. In summer the fish often escape below, or jump over the net; but in winter they behave as though blind, or dull with the cold. In summer the mullet are always rushing with the tide, more or less, but there is no particular season for their mobbing in schools. I have never seen them going through the Heads to the sea, but the Natives frequently bring fish from outside. Can always recognise them, as they are quite clean and free from mud in their guts, as they live by suction only. Has seen the fish in full roe in February and March. All winter the fish are in good condition, but from June to December they are best. Outside fish are almost too fat, but after having been a few days inside the harbour they appear to lose much of the coarse fat, but without becoming lean fish. The prices we get are not ruled by any particular time, as the supply of the market depends altogether on the coolness of the weather. The fish are least valuable immediately after the roe is spent; but, with the exception that the lower belly part is thinner, and the flesh less rich, there is no difference. In this state they keep, and are quite wholesome. In fact, at no season is the mullet out of condition so that they are unfit for food; but in warm weather it is difficult to send them to market, and we do not try to catch them. I have never yet sent fish to Auckland which arrived in bad condition, and am very careful about them. I believe the canneries drop the offal into the sea. It is the scales of the fish (not the offal) that will drive the fish away. Has known a mullet fishery in France destroyed by letting the scales escape into the sea. The chief enemies of the mullet are shags; schnapper only eat them after they are netted. Kahawai take a few young ones, but they live chiefly on the fish we call "sprats" here (the green sea-mullet—*aua*, or *kahawhiti*, of the Maoris). Dog-fish only attack mullet when they are meshed in the net, as they are not swift enough to catch them otherwise. There are a great many shags, but not more than there used to be. The other fish besides mullet caught in Kaipara are two flounders, the black one being very rare; one kind of sole, also very rare; kahawai, schnapper, trevalli (in spring time), horse mackerel, a few gurnard, and eels; but I only fish for flounders and mullet. I fish for flounders with the mullet-nets, as it would not pay to have a separate set of nets for them. The nets are set on a bank that goes dry, in a half-circle, and as the fish recede with the tide they are caught in the bunt of the net, but are rarely meshed. They are not getting much scarcer. Six months ago I got 300 dozen in one haul, of which I sent 180 dozen to market. About 500 dozen is the biggest haul of fish ever caught in Kaipara. It was last winter, and the men had to cut the net away. It was afterwards picked up at the pilot-station full of rotten fish. [This was afterwards corroborated by Captain Smith.] There is no real necessity for a close season for fishing. All fishermen require a slack time to put their nets and boats in order, and naturally choose the time when the fish are of the least value. The Batley men, on account of the great length of net they use, which by joining up are sometimes 1,000 yards long, require at least two months. Here we take six weeks. I wish to say, at Helensville, we have only four days in the week in which to make our living by supplying the Auckland market, owing to the number of holidays. We do not work on Sunday. We have Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, and on Friday and Saturday there is no market. At Batley they fish seven days in the week. If there were to be a close season it should be from the 20th December to the 20th February, but only because this is the hottest time of the year. I do not think any closing is necessary, but if there is to be one, the old mouth of the Otamatea should be the boundary, as there is no man living inside that can catch fish for the local market, nor can he catch fish outside for the canneries, as the distances are too great at that season of the year in either case to deliver them in a fresh condition. One of the chief causes of the frightening and driving about of the fish is the use of the paddle-steamer "Osprey." The fish are all cleared out of the channel she follows. During the close season and hot weather the fish accumulate in the Otamatea arm and its branches, which are only visited by one screw-steamer in a week, and when the canneries resume work enormous hauls are made, such as 400 dozen to 500 dozen per week to each boat. These big takes last two months fully, and gradually the fish clear out, probably to Hokianga, and never come back.

*Mr. Masefield*, sen., Batley: Began fishing and canning fourteen years ago, following the American system. There have been many changes since then. There was no systematic fishing by white folks before I began. Fish was scarcer in 1884, at which time we left to start a factory at Hokianga, Bay of Islands. They increased again, but are now not nearly so plentiful as when we commenced. Now the fishermen have to go out of the river to the banks; formerly they got plenty in the river. They are not even so plentiful in the channels and on the banks. Formerly you could not pull a boat about the harbour without a number jumping into it; that never occurs now.