

Wellington, 8th December, 1886.

I think prescribing a close season for mullet was premature, for several reasons: First, that no proof has been offered of a general scarcity of the fish, but only that they migrate, and are more abundant in particular localities in one year than another; second, that there is a great conflict of testimony as to the proper months for a close season, and especially as to whether the same close season would answer for all localities. More precise information should have been collected on these points, and it would have been particularly useful to have obtained the evidence of the Natives, who are largely interested. The total white population of the Kaipara district, for instance, is not one-tenth of what the Native population used to be, and yet the Natives were almost wholly dependent on the mullet for food at certain seasons. Either the Maoris must have thoroughly understood how to conserve the fisheries while our people have lost the art, or else there must be some mistake about the great falling-off in the supply. I can quite understand that in the narrow creeks and inlets near a cannery, if the offal is discharged into the tideway, the fish may cease to frequent the vicinity, and that dog-fish and their other enemies will increase; but in that case the falling-off of the fish-supply would be local, and could be easily remedied. I should recommend that the experiment be confined for the present to one locality,—say all those parts of the Kaipara Harbour within the Otamatea and Oruawhoro branches, as shown by the red line A-B from Komiti Point to Oewa Point on the attached plan, as I gather from the attached papers that it is in this part of the harbour that the scarcity of fish has been complained of.

JAMES HECTOR.

Kaipara, 17th April, 1895.

In answer to your memorandum of the 4th ultimo, *re* close season for mullet, I have the honour to report that to the best of my knowledge there has been no breach of the law in catching mullet in the closed part of the harbour. Had there been any, the matter would soon have been reported to me, as the two preserving companies here are very antagonistic, and each one keeps a rather sharp look-out on the other's operations. I do not think it advisable to close the whole of the harbour during any portion of the year; by doing so during any of the summer months you would deprive the local people of an article of diet when most required, and one which is sought after the whole year round. I do not think there is any danger of mullet diminishing in quantity through local sales, but rather by the large quantities supplied to the canning factories, more especially during the spawning season. That being so, I would advise that instead of proclaiming a close season in any waters provided that all canning factories be closed during the months of December, January, and February (the spawning season). There being no clashing of interests in the sales of fresh and corned mullet, the canning companies should not object to this arrangement; besides, it merely changes the close season from the water to the factory, with the advantage of its being better and easier over-looked, and also, I believe, would tend more to preserve the fish than the present method of closing certain waters.

J. CHRISTY SMITH, Harbourmaster.

Wellington, 5th June, 1895.

Only a small portion of the harbour is closed from the 1st December to the 31st March, and Masefield Brothers complain that other canning companies catch and can mullet during the close season, and escape the consequences by alleging that the fish were caught outside the closed limits. They urged that it is impossible to verify this, and that it is necessary to close the whole harbour in order that those who are disposed to break the law may not have an advantage. The harbourmaster reports against this, stating that he does not think the law has been infringed, and urges that residents outside of the present closed limits should not be deprived of the opportunity of taking mullet for their own use or for sale. He suggests that the canning-factories should be closed instead from December to March. This would require an alteration in the law, but it seems to me to be a very good solution of the difficulty. I propose that Messrs. Masefield be asked to express their opinion on it.

W. T. GLASGOW.

Wellington, 20th July, 1895.

No reply has been received from Masefield. Ewing and Co. point out that the proposal to shut factories during the close season will not affect Masefield Brothers, because they tin fruit in their factory, the time for which is the close season. If Ewing and Co. were deprived of the liberty to can during the close season fish taken outside the portion of the harbour closed, a great hardship would be inflicted on them, as they would have to dismiss their men, and take on a new lot when the season opened. In view of this conflicting interest, I find it difficult to advise. Possibly the member for the district—Otamatea, part of Kaipara—might aid in arriving at a settlement.

W. T. GLASGOW.

5th October, 1895.—W. T. Glasgow: Instructions for Sir J. Hector to proceed to Kaipara.

1st October, 1895.—Mr. Massey: Question about hardship of recent Order in Council.

Mr. Ewing, Veterinary Surgeon: Seventy people will be thrown out of work. No scarcity of fish. Only one firm wants to can fruit for December to March, and to prevent others canning fish. Says the close season should be from 20th December to 20th February, and should only apply to canneries, and not to fishing.

Petition (23 signatures): Against the change in the regulations, made on the 9th September, 1895. Consider all regulations sufficient.

10th October, 1895.—Ewing and Co.: Enclose petition against change, and state that no fishermen and only one firm desire the change. Ask for an inquiry.

9th September, 1895.—Order closing the whole of Kaipara Harbour from 1st December to 31st March.

9th September, 1895.—Ross: Objects to any change; that three months long enough to close season.

4th September, 1895.—Mr. Mitchelson: Question: Wants the change.

21st August, 1895.—Masefield and Co.: Urge the change to 1st December to 7th March.

30th August, 1895.—W. T. Glasgow: Minutes. Mr. Thompson agrees with Masefield, and thinks whole harbour should be closed from 1st December to 31st March.

14th August, 1895.—Alex. Rose, Collector of Customs, Auckland: Recommends that close season should apply to everywhere.

10th August, 1895.—Masefield Brothers: Complain that the law is evaded. Says, 1st December to 10th March all canneries should be closed.

NEWSPAPER EXTRACTS.

[Extract from the *New Zealand Herald*, 26th October, 1886.]

THE CLOSE SEASON FOR MULLET.

MR. C. BISHOP, of Customs Street, sends us the following: "To my very great astonishment I read in your issue of the 22nd instant that there was to be a close season for mullet during the months of December, January, and February, reputed to be spawning-time. Now, the mullet has two spawning seasons in the year, so that we should want the fishing for mullet to be prohibited altogether. What would be the result of this close season? Why, a hundred men would be thrown out of the means of earning a livelihood, and many of them just having spent their all on their nets and boats. (A case in point—there is a man who has just spent £12 on a net to fish during the months which, with this law coming into force, would be to him a great loss.) And with the depression hanging over us at present, what are these men to do? Will our law-makers find them employment to keep their wives and families during the time of their enforced inactivity? The paragraph also states that inquiries have been made respecting this question; but I cannot find any one in Auckland that heard anything about it until it appeared in your columns. Before such a great change as this was made in our fishing, it ought to have come before the House in session, so that reliable evidence could have been obtained, and we should then have known who the parties were who were so interested in some way or the other for themselves by trying to throw a hundred