

J. Masefield, J. Gardner, and Ewing and Co. (all fish-curers at the Kaipara), and from Mr. J. Shepherd and Mr. J. Munro; the latter, who is Customs Officer at Whangarei, being an old and experienced fisherman. Information was also obtained from Auckland to the effect that the fish are in the best condition during the winter months, that they are most easily captured in the spawning season, December and January, when they come into shallow water to spawn, and that they do not recover their condition until March. It is stated that when the fish are caught immediately before the spawning season they are in such poor condition that when the roe is taken out very little of value is left for food. I enclose copy of a letter on the subject, which has been received to-day, from Messrs. Ewing and Co.—ROBERT STOUT.—Marine Department Wellington, 15th November, 1886.”

“Batley, Kaipara, Auckland, 5th November, 1886.—The Hon. Commissioner of Trade and Customs, Wellington. Hon. Sir,—Confirming our respects of the 1st instant, we have since learnt from the Auckland papers that a close season for mullet is proposed to be gazetted now for the months December, January, and February, which we feel sure will be very satisfactory tidings to all who have any staple interest in the matter. At the same time, we notice that the proposal has called forth a certain amount of opposition, as shown by letters published in above papers; and although we do not think such opposition worth noticing, emanating, as it does, from fishmongers whose interest it is naturally to keep their trade going all the year round, and especially during the summer months, still we should be glad to hear from you should any serious opposition be made that would be likely to influence the question, as in that case we should be prepared to enter fully into the discussion, and bring to bear on the subject some evidence of weight, both of our own and of all the fishermen employed in this district. However, as yet the arguments published in the papers against the measure are from men whose only interest in the question are on an entirely different footing to those whose business it is to can the fish up in quantities for export and home consumption, and are so ridiculous and unable to bear the light of investigation that we do not think them worthy of discussion. It is surely the strongest argument in favour of the measure that all the canning companies in this district have always hitherto, of their own free-will, closed their operations during December, January, and February, notwithstanding the expense it means to some to have their works lying idle.—We have, &c., EWING AND CO.”

To this Mr. Bishop and the fishermen replied that the fish are as numerous now as ever they were on our coasts. And indeed it is absurd to think that the few people who now catch fish on our coasts can make any difference in the numbers of the mullet. If so, what will be left of our fisheries when the country is thickly populated, and when ten thousand fish are caught for every one now taken? There are, of course, times when fish are scarce, but these have nothing to do with anything done by man. The mullet, it seems, are in the best condition just before spawning. Spent-fish are not often caught, because when they spawn they hurry back into deeper water to recruit. The desire of the canners for a close season is accounted for by the fact that during the height of summer they cannot carry on their operations owing to the heat, while if fresh mullet are not allowed to be caught they will have a good chance of selling the canned article. It will be impossible to stop the catching of mullet altogether, for in many places the mouth of a creek is spanned by a net, and mullet and other kinds of fish are taken. So stands the controversy as to the mullet, and in the meantime the taking of mullet is illegal from the beginning of December to the end of February.

[Extract from the *New Zealand Herald*, 23rd November, 1886.]

THE MULLET CLOSE SEASON.

To the Editor.

SIR,—I have read with great interest the correspondence in your paper respecting the above. I have been engaged in the mullet-fishing from Auckland for the last twenty years. There is one fact I would draw the attention of all your readers to—namely, the price of mullet now and formerly. Twenty years ago the price from the boats was 17s. to £1 10s. per dozen. Now, Sir, if the mullet (according to the statement of Ewing and Co., Kaipara) do not appear on our coasts in the same numbers as formerly, what would be their price to-day, considering we have a population about four times larger? Why, they would be a great luxury, only obtainable by a very few wealthy individuals; but, on the contrary, they are found in larger numbers, and are cheaper than they ever were. You can now for 6d. get a larger mullet than formerly for 2s. These are facts undeniable. I may say that all of us fishermen caught more mullet last winter than were ever caught before within my experience. Then, why this cry to Government for a close season for mullet? The only answer, I hear, is for Ewing and Co. to sell their canned mullet, while we hard-working fishermen have to remain idle for three months and let the sharks and yellowtail eat the mullet that ought to be coming to market and sold as food for man. Now, Sir, I hope all the members for Auckland will stand by us, and not allow such a cruel thing to pass, whereby over twenty men and their families will be placed in a position of want, through the Government taking notice of men who are either not acquainted with anything pertaining to fish, or are actuated by base, selfish motives. I trust the Press will help us, and all impartial men, for we will not give up our bread without a hard struggle. I may say that the statement relating to spent mullet being unfit for food is true; but do ever any come to the market? I can say that during my fishing I have not caught more than a dozen fish in twenty years. We scarcely ever see them; they go into deep water to recruit.—I am, &c.,

Auckland.

J. COPE, Fisherman.

Re the close season for mullet: A fish-curer informs us that to stop the fishing for a time is quite right, but it should have been a month earlier, as the fish are now spawning. The close season begins in November.

[Extract from the *New Zealand Herald*, 24th November, 1886.]

THE CLOSE SEASON FOR MULLET.

Our Matakoho correspondent writes: “In a few days, unless the Government recalls its veto, the new close season for mullet will commence. At the very time when the fish seek the shallow creeks, and settlers are able without much waste of time to take them—at the very time, too, when they are fattest and in best condition for the table, our sapient law-makers (of stoat and weasel notoriety) have prohibited their being caught. Is it possible that the mullet have become so scarce as to require protection? The whole of New Zealand, North and South Island, does not equal in population a first class English town; and it is therefore most alarming if the fishery is already beginning to fail. The herring-fishery is carried on in England and Scotland during the spawning season, and thousands of herrings are taken there for every mullet captured in New Zealand, and yet the fish are as plentiful as ever. It is difficult to believe the Government are not mistaken about the mullet; but if they, unfortunately, do require protection, why, in the name of common-sense, are the months of December, January, and February chosen? During these months the mullet-canning factories suspend operations on account, I believe, of hot weather, and the fish have comparatively a good time of it. Possibly our learned statesmen, having looked up the natural history of the mullet, selected the months because the fish are then in full spawn. But all the fish which have been sold down in their tin coffins by Messrs. Ewing and Co. and Messrs. Masefield Brothers, during the now-expiring season, would, had they been undisturbed in the water, have been just as full of roe as any of those that are to be protected, and I am certain there are more fish taken in one week when the tinning-factories are in operation than are caught during the whole of the three months (December, January, and February) that they are closed. If there must be a close season, then why not make it earlier in the year, when fish are caught in large quantities, and not punish the poor settlers by stopping their supplies of mullet during the only period of the year that they can be caught near home? There is another point I should like to mention. During the proposed fence months young sharks and dog-fish come up the creeks in great numbers, and in fishing many of these enemies of the mullet are captured in the nets and destroyed. A few days before last Christmas 127 young sharks and dog-fish were taken here one afternoon in a net about 200 yards long. Now, supposing that each of these sea-vermin eat a mullet a day (a very low estimate), they would have destroyed by this time about 40,000 fish, or about ten times as many as I believe are