

During the greater part of the season of 1912 the quality of the oysters was poor. This season, however, from the opening on the 1st March, they have been exceptionally good. The local Inspector reports that this season most of the oysters are being taken from a bed which has not been worked for nearly twenty years. Information has been received to the effect that the supply on some of the old beds which have been persistently worked for a good many years is giving out. Some inquiries have been made, but the information received has not been quite satisfactory, and I would recommend that the matter should be carefully inquired into and, if considered necessary, a survey of these beds made. These beds are a most valuable asset for the Dominion, and every care must be taken to preserve them. The quantity of oysters exported from the Bluff during the year was 378,896 dozen, valued at £2,984, and the quantity of fish exported was 5,908½ cwt., valued at £8,660.

The Inspector reports that the Norwegian Whaling Company, which has been operating to the west of Stewart Island and Foveaux Strait during the last eleven months, has been successful in capturing forty-five whales (principally sperm), yielding 159 tons of oil, valued at £2,350, and from a large sperm whale ambergris to the value of £32,000 was obtained.

There exists from Waikawa westward to Preservation Inlet and round Stewart Island one of the most important and extensive fisheries in the Dominion. It includes our most extensive blue-cod fishery, and all the other varieties of South Island market fishes are abundant in its waters. With the exception of blue cod, this fishery has not been made use of to any extent for supplying the market with other varieties. The principal reasons for this have been the inadequate steamer communication with Stewart Island, and lack of railway facilities for getting fish to the Dunedin and Christchurch markets in quick time, so as to ensure its arrival in good condition. When these disabilities are removed and more interest is taken in marketing these fish by the Bluff fish-merchants this fishery will undoubtedly supply large quantities regularly to Dunedin and Christchurch, and at certain seasons to the Wellington market.

By instructions from the Minister of Marine an inquiry was held at the Bluff in September last by Mr. McClure, Chief Commissioner of Crown Lands for Southland, and myself into the question of the size-limit at which blue cod should be allowed to be taken. Very full evidence was given by the fishermen's representatives from Stewart Island and other parts. As a result of the evidence given it was recommended in the report furnished to the Department that the size-limit approved by the fishermen should be adopted—viz., 10½ in. in length for whole fish and 9 in. when headed.

An inquiry was also held at Invercargill in September by myself and Mr. Anderson, Acting Collector of Customs, into the question of the netting and sale of trout in the New River estuary. The representatives of the local acclimatization society, Anglers' Club, and others interested gave very full evidence against netting being allowed; and evidence was given by fishermen, fish-dealers, and others in favour of the netting and sale of trout. After the inquiry was finished the area where netting has been allowed was inspected and tested. As a result of the inquiry it was recommended that the netting (within the present limits) and sale of trout should be allowed for the present, but that trout-netting licenses should only be granted to professional fishermen.

*Rock-oyster Beds.*—Last picking season was a most successful one—it extended the full six months; and with the exception of the usual rush during the first few weeks, the market all the rest of the season was fully supplied. The total quantity picked was 7,728 sacks, 3,430 being taken from the Bay of Island beds and 4,298 from the Hauraki Gulf. As an indication of the great improvement which has taken place in the condition of the oyster-beds in the Hauraki Gulf it may be stated that only about half the available beds were picked last season, and these supplied all the oysters required; the rest of the beds, although ready to pick, were not required, and will yield a very large supply of oysters of the finest quality this season. I made a detailed inspection of all the beds in December last, and found a steady improvement in their condition everywhere.

The replanting done by the Department on the Coromandel coast and islands in the Thames Gulf is already effecting an improvement in the beds in these places. Where the first planting was done large numbers of young oysters can now be seen along the rocks, the result of the spawn from the brood oysters planted. The steady improvement in the beds can undoubtedly be taken as clear evidence that the system of picking and protecting the beds which has now been adopted by the Government is the right one.

*Whaling.*—Three foreign whaling firms commenced operations during the year, but two of these have left the Dominion for other countries where they are confident better results will be obtained. Messrs. Cook and Jagger, and the whalers in Tory Channel, express themselves as well satisfied with the season's operations.

*Atlantic Salmon.*—As the importation of herring-ova and other sea-fish was taken in hand last season no importation of salmon-eggs was made. The success of the acclimatization of the quinnat salmon was, I consider, due to the systematic effort made, and it is to be hoped that a similar effort will be made with these fish. If this is done I am sanguine that we will be equally successful in establishing them, and I would strongly recommend that the importation of not less than a million eggs should be made this coming season.

*Quinnat Salmon.*—In point of numbers the run of this salmon, which spawned in the Waitaki River and its tributaries last season, was quite equal to any of the previous years. The average size of the fish was, however, larger, and a peculiarity of the run was the very large percentage of male salmon which were captured. In other seasons the fish taken were about equal sexes, but last season nearly twice as many male fish were taken as females. Had the percentage of