

During the last twenty years immense quantities of oysters have been taken from these beds, and there has of late years been a large increasing demand both for local consumption and for export, and it must be expected that this demand will continue to increase. The total quantity taken from these beds last season was 1,575,886 dozen. Of this quantity, 372,649 dozen was exported, and the balance (1,143,237 dozen) was used in New Zealand. The total value of the oysters taken is estimated at £10,641.

These beds are a valuable asset to the Dominion, and form a very important section of our sea-fisheries, and it is most important that they should be conserved and worked to the best advantage for the people of the Dominion; and all sentiment and personal considerations must be put aside when it is a question of dealing with this or any other of the Dominion's assets. Until recently it was thought that the supply of oysters on these beds was practically inexhaustible, but during the last two years there has been clear indications that they have been thinned out on some of the beds which have been worked constantly for a number of years. In speaking to some of the oyster-dredgers about the condition of these beds they said certain beds were "worked out." Mr. Hunter, in his report of the 8th May, uses the term "thinned out." The point, however, is that it is possible to deplete these beds by overdredging. With the rock-oyster beds a person can see their condition, but with the dredge-oyster beds their condition can only be determined by the quantity and quality of oysters dredged up.

The dredging and marketing of oysters from these beds is done by the fish and oyster merchants at Bluff, who own the oystering-vessels and employ men (who are paid a certain price per 100 dozen) to dredge and bring the oysters in. No special oyster license fee or royalty is paid, and they are under no restrictions as to the locality worked or quantity of oysters taken, &c.

Taking everything into consideration in connection with these oyster-beds, I am convinced that the Government should undertake the dredging and marketing in a similar way to that which is being done with the Auckland rock-oysters. By doing this the conservation of the beds from now on would be assured, and the Government would derive a considerable revenue, which would assist in defraying the cost of developing other sections of the fisheries; and I recommend that this should be done at once.

#### *Toheroas.*

As this shell-fish becomes known its popularity as an article of diet increases. In the districts in the north where it is plentiful it is in great demand.

Two toheroa-canneries are now operating at a point about half-way between Maunganui Bluff and Kaipara North Head. Extensive toheroa-beds exist along this range of coast, and also from Kaipara South Head south as far as the sandy beach, and sandhill formation extends along the coast. Toheroas are also said to exist in large quantities along the Seventy-mile Beach north of Ahipara. They are also found in the South Island, where well-stocked beds have been discovered quite recently.

#### *Mussels.*

A good deal of attention is now being given to mussels, both fresh and canned, as an article of diet. On the Coromandel coast bottling for the local market has been carried on for some years, and lately an up-to-date cannery has been started in the Town of Coromandel, the output from which is reported to meet with ready sale. Inquiries have recently been received from Australia regarding the quantity of mussels available for canning purposes, and as this bivalve is found in abundance round the New Zealand coast, there is every probability of an important trade being developed.

### FISHERY LAWS AND REGULATIONS.

Every country has its fishery laws and regulations necessary for the administration, control, and conservation of its fisheries. It will be seen by the *résumé* forwarded with this report that in the countries referred to the authorities have very extensive powers given them under their Fisheries Acts for regulating and controlling the fisheries.

To be effective, all fishery laws and regulations should be based on a thorough knowledge of the conditions obtaining in each locality and of the life habits of the fishes dealt with. The study of the life habits of our fishes at the Marine Station at Portobello and the biological survey of our coastal waters as recommended in this report will be of greatest assistance in teaching us what conservation laws are really necessary. As time has gone on there has been many changes in connection with fishery questions, and we have become better acquainted with the habits of our fishes and the conditions obtaining on our fishing-grounds. In view of this, I think it is advisable that a careful revision of our fishery laws and regulations should be made in order to see what alterations may be necessary in the interests of the industry.

### FISH-MARKETS.

Well constructed and arranged fish-markets are much required in the principal centres, and would be a boon to the fisherman, the public, and the retailer, and for these and sanitary reasons the municipal authorities of the principal cities should construct them.

At Dunedin the only wholesale fish-market is on a platform in the railway station-yard. At Christchurch there is a private wholesale market. At Wellington there is a retail municipal market, and a wholesale market on the premises of one of the auctioneering firms. At Auckland there is no wholesale market, and fishermen have to sell their fish directly to the fish-merchants.

In going through the replies received from the various countries, it appears that all the municipal markets are for wholesale purposes only. The idea that one central wholesale and retail market will serve the whole population of a city is, of course, a mistake, as any market or shop will only serve the