

## REPORT ON FISHERIES FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31st MARCH, 1937.

SIR,—

By the way of introduction to this annual report on fisheries attention may be drawn to the twofold purpose that should be served by such a report. It should provide (a) a record of fishery conditions for the period under review, and (b) a record of official action and departmental functions in relation to fisheries administration. The first is obviously necessary to provide data for the intelligent consideration of fishery facts—past, present, or impending—by those who may have a commercial, administrative, or legislative interest in the matter; and the second, the administrative aspect of the report, is desirable in order that the public and their parliamentary representatives may be in a position to understand what is being done by and for the State to ensure that those national assets constituted by the fisheries are being utilized in a rational way and for the nation's benefit, which is, or should be, the aim of legislation and administration with regard to fisheries or any other national assets.

To render an account of fishery conditions is to deal with a subject that is notoriously obscure, illusive, and liable to present controversial aspects. It is commonly assumed that no one can know the true facts about fish and fishing so well as those who are actually engaged in the industry. So long as that is the case, the official administration of fisheries is a thing of futility not fulfilling its purpose. For a long time that actually was the case and, superficially regarded, it did not seem to matter. It is still the case in relation to many aspects of fishery conditions; the agents of exploitation are forging ahead while the agency for conservation is groping, its true course being out of sight or out of focus. But the present generation is at least beginning to suspect that conservation does matter. Whatever the limitations of departmental administration of fisheries have been with regard to practical knowledge, it has always had the important qualification of being disinterested. The object of the practical man, as fish-catcher or fish-dealer, is the maximum profit for himself with the minimum cost and effort. The administrator's object is to ensure rational utilization, to control exploitation so that it does not out-pace conservation, that present profits may not be made at the expense of posterity. To this end he must have an understanding of the practical facts of exploitation in general and in detail, an understanding of the conditions of to-day in comparison with those of the past, and, if possible, a prevision of the trend towards developments that are likely to occur in the future. He must have an understanding of the practical facts of the industry and a good deal more besides.

If this report were as near the ideal fisheries report as its writer would like it to be it would demonstrate these points in the clearest possible light. All that can be said is that an attempt has been made, in the time available, to bring out some of the essential facts of the situation. In so far as the facts are not sufficiently elucidated it must be inferred that the administrative machinery is not adequate. Its fundamental limitation may be pointed out. It resides in the fact that, while the Department has made steady progress, which has been accelerated during the last year, in acquiring a more detailed and a more comprehensive knowledge of the results of fishery exploitation, its knowledge of the capital stocks of fish that are available for exploitation proceeds very slowly because it is not yet equipped to acquire such knowledge by special investigations such as have been carried on during the last thirty years or more by all the civilized countries that take a serious interest in their fishery resources. There are, fortunately, prospects at last of some development in this direction to which reference will be made later.

During the year under review the staff of the Fisheries Branch was augmented by the appointment of two cadets, one of whom commenced his duties on 14th September, 1936, and the other on the 14th January, 1937. The strength of our personnel was reduced, however, by the appointment of Mr. M. W. Young to the Sea Fisheries Investigation Committee set up by the Hon. the Minister of Industries and Commerce in January, 1937. This is only a temporary loss, and there is no doubt but that the detailed local evidence collected by this Committee throughout the Dominion will be of considerable assistance to the Government in dealing with the present problems in connection with all aspects of the fish industry.

Much appreciated provision was also made during the year for the strengthening of the provincial staff of the Fisheries Branch by creating appointments for a District Inspector of Fisheries for the Wellington, Canterbury, and Otago Provinces respectively. Hitherto there were no local whole-time Inspectors of Fisheries except in the Auckland Province, where attention to rock-oyster beds constituted their principal duties. The appointments of District Inspectors were not made until after the end of the year under review.

With the increased surveillance over fishery operations and the closer and more frequent contacts with the members of the industry that may now be expected the supply of information to headquarters will be more valuable than hitherto and future reports should thereby be much improved. In the present report, however, it is only on the statistical side that any important development can be recorded. For the first time in the history of the Department we have obtained data that may properly be called statistical. Though the fullest possible use cannot be made of them in this present report owing to limitations of time, the records are in our possession in detail and in collated form which can be utilized for purposes for which the records of previous years were quite inadequate. The statistical tables that it has been customary to present with this report are for this year based on monthly returns of the landings of individual fishing-vessels and not, as hitherto, on an estimate made for a whole year by local Inspectors who sometimes had limited opportunities for obtaining comprehensive data for such an estimate.

I would here express the thanks of the Fisheries Branch of the Department to the skippers and owners of fishing-vessels for the generally very satisfactory way in which they have co-operated with us in connection with these monthly returns. I believe it arises from a general desire to help, based