

CEDUNA AND FAR WEST NEWS

ROYAL COMMISSION ON FISHING INDUSTRY.

CEDUNA SITTING.

A Royal Commission to inquire into the fishing industry, and to hear the views of fisherman, sat at the Council Chambers, Ceduna, on Thursday evening and Friday morning, 25th. and 26th. April last.

The members of the Commission were: Messrs. R. J. Rudall, M.P. (chairman), Mr. H. M. Hale, of the South Australian Museum, Mr. C. A. Sheridan, a practical fisherman and Mr. A. Symons, Secretary.

Mr. C. F. Pavey, accompanied the Commission as official reporter.

There was a very representative gathering of fishermen and others some 30 in all, and great interest was shown by all. Opinions were divided on some subjects and some of those present voiced their opinions in anything but a gentle manner. The gathering was somewhat cosmopolitan and there was much confusion of tongues. Generally it was agreed that the supply of fish in these waters was decreasing. There were some who did not believe that this was so and averred that the increase of fisherman would account for the decrease.

But there was a consensus of opinion that there should be a close season for schnapper at all events. Here again were a few dissentients. These did not like to think how they could live during a close season, should it be ordained, but these were reminded that a temporary closing of the grounds would ensure a continuity of increase in the future. Many had complaints against the marketing of the fish, but none of the transport.

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The Chairman, on opening the sitting, said the Commission had been sent by the Government to give opportunity to practical fishermen to give any evidence which would lead to the betterment of the fishing industry. The commission wanted to know their views on fisheries, marketing and everything connected with the industry.

Before evidence was taken, Mr. Saxeld, a fisherman asked the Chairman that all evidence might be taken in public. The Chairman regretted that the rule was that evidence could be taken in private as well as in public, and he could not vary that rule.

R. C. Hawker in testifying, was not at all satisfied with the present marketing arrangements in Adelaide and Melbourne. He said that charges came to 25 per cent. which was too much.

The Chairman reminded the witness that the commission had no power in other States.

The witness thought that there should be Government control in the markets. He did not approve of netting or long line fishing for schnapper. The lines were followed by sharks who got many fish and frightened others away. He was in favor of a close season for fish during certain summer months.

Alfred Edwards said he had an almost lifelong experience as a fisherman. He used the long schnapper lines but did not lose many fish. He favoured a close season from September to March. He thought the supply had deteriorated by fishing during the spawning season. The schnapper were decreasing but he did not think it was owing to the use of long lines rather was it due to the catches during the spawning season. He found road transport better than rail or sea. As to whiting he could not suggest a close season but there should be protection as

to whiting he could not suggest a close season, but there should be protection as there is not a better place for breeding than this.

The Chairman.—If the decrease continues, then your occupation would be gone.

Mr. E. Poppell said schnapper were decreasing, but that was owing to the increase of fishermen. Practically everybody is using the long lines and they appear to be satisfied that they do the industry no harm. He was in favour of Government market supervision and thought that the markets should be daily reported as to prices which reports should be authorised by Government. He said there was plenty of room for all with hooks, but not with nets.

Mr. A. Costanos said he had fished all neighbouring areas. Generally he thought supplies were not decreasing but would advocate a close season which would help to keep up supplies. "I used long lines but ceased to do so when I found I could do as well with hand-lines" the witness said.

J. Criticos, another fisherman, said there was not much difference in supply. If you work you catch. If you idle you don't. First he had a small dinghy and could not use long lines. Now has a big boat and does well. Fishermen must have an open go to earn a living and living is very expensive to a family man. He favoured close season of three months for schnapper and whiting.

P. Vambacas said fish were decreasing. When he came here first there were plenty fish in the bay, but now there are few. There are too many fishing and they chase the fish away. He advocated three months close season, but outside that time, no restrictions of any kind. The

time, no restrictions of any kind. The big people are driving the small men out. He did not use nets as they destroyed feed and militated against future supplies.

W. J. Thompson, Thevenard, said the supply of fish is decreasing. It was ridiculous to say that it was not. He did not favour nets. If nets and long lines are used, fishing will soon be a thing of the past.

G. Spirou advocated a close season and was against netting.

Joseph Keiptan gave his opinion as to whiting breeding. He was in favour of protection and against the use of ground bait. He gave interesting evidence of the habits of whiting at home and abroad. The supply of fish was not increasing. He favoured a close season for schnapper.

William A. Pufahl, a fisherman of 20 years standing said the supply was falling off owing to the increased number of fishermen. In fact, the supply was not falling off, but it was distributed among too many. He used long lines and did not think they did any harm. He recommended a limitation to 200 hooks per boat irrespective of the number of dinghies. Long lines should be stopped in spawning time. He did not use nets now for schnapper, but was not against the practise. He would not favour a close season as men with families could not afford it. With the Government issuing licenses wholesale it is hard to make a living. He favoured nets for whiting, they may frighten the fish for a day or two but they don't destroy the ground. If the supply gets less there should be fewer fishermen.

The Chairmen thought that prohibition of nets would protect the smaller men.

The witness said that regulations as to size of fish were disregarded and infringement was going on from day to day.

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The chairman could not see reason in persisting in a policy which would cut their own throats. The witness said that the man who comes to fish temporarily does not care what he does. He would limit the number of fishing licenses. He did not believe in larger boats making room for small craft. He was perfectly satisfied with transport which was better now than ever it was. Road was superior to rail or sea. In answer to Mr. Hale, the witness did not think that long lines hurt the fish. If they were cut out it would decrease the supply. He used 5ft. nets in as shallow water as possible. He did not like Seine nets, there was too much waste. He had not heard of amateurs using nets for years. He had fished at Davenport creek but had not heard of nets being used there. He thought amateurs should be governed by the same laws as professionals.

The sitting then adjourned and was resumed on Friday morning.

C. Ross Morcom did not think supplies would hold up. He did not think many whiting were caught after nets had been used on the fishing grounds. The fish were disturbed and cleared out. If mesh was smaller it might better things. There was no proper supervision as to the size of fish caught. He thought whiting spawned all the year round. He did not believe in long lines as they destroy the fish and attract sea vermin. He objected to Southern Europeans getting permits to fish before taking out naturalisation papers.

Mr. Hale said that the keeping a record of all catches by fisherman would furnish statistics by which increase or decrease could be more easily determined.

C. Saxel had been fishing for five years. Supplies were keeping up, particularly whiting. He thought there

years. Supplies were keeping up, particularly schnapper. He thought there should be a distance of 12 feet between hooks and 4ft. snoozes on the long lines. More play would not prevent attack by sharks. He had not found more wastage on long lines than on hand lines. Wherever there is a school of schnapper, there

will be sharks. He thought it would be better to abolish long lines pending investigation. Netting does more harm than long lines as far as schnapper are concerned. He did not favour close seasons. He was aware that fishing questions in the North Sea were causing great anxiety and regulations as to conservation in England were very stringent, and in view of the future those regulations had to be enforced. The Chairman thought that promiscuous fishing must diminish supply and therefore imperil the future. The witness thought that scientific research into the question of breeding would be a great help to the industry.

Mr. Hale said, "We have to face the fact that in other parts fishing has been depleted. Could not the same happen here?" The witness compared big draughts 20 years ago with decreased catches at present.

Mr. Hale said that grounds fished continually must suffer. A cooperative Fisherman's Association might help matters.

Mr. Pufahl in further evidence asked for particulars as to regulating size of fish.

The Chairman said that fishermen only got copies of regulations, but these without the act, were vague. The act should be printed with the regulations.

Mr. W. A. Hill, fish buyer, gave valuable testimony. He said the Melbourne markets were controlled by the City

markets were controlled by the City Council. The stalls therein were sublet to seven or eight auctioneers under supervision of Council. South Australian fish arrived there each day by express. There was keen competition among the auctioneers whose business it was to satisfy the fishermen. The purchasers can select fish in any quantity they like, and it is difficult to dispose of baskets which have been sampled by pickers of the best. Health officers have unlimited powers as to condemnation and the presence of one bad fish in a basket condemns the lot. Fishermen are receiving more facilities than any other primary producers. They have freight paid and boxes supplied and are under no expense until their fish reaches the buyer. Schnapper breeds in December and January but there is little known as to the breeding of whiting. This is a matter for much wanted scientific research. Our fishing grounds are too far away from the capitals for the fish to retain their natural freshness on which so much depends. Careless handling of fish is the cause of so much wastage. The fish when caught are thrown into a well too crowded and consequently are murdered and a murdered fish cannot be preserved like that which dies a natural death. The witness went into the methods of freezing whether by the brine or the ammonia process and he also explained the procedure between providers and retailers. He gave valuable information as to what would improve the position of our fishermen and strongly advocated the appointment of more supervisors. In the bad handling of fish, the men were making a rod for their own backs.

This concluded the sitting of the Commission which left Colima by car on Friday afternoon.
