

EARLY SUPERVISION

In early days supervision of the fisheries was the responsibility of the Canadian naval authority. Then for several decades fisheries was one of the two branches of the Canadian Department of Marine and Fisheries. These were federal agencies. In addition there was an active supervision of fishery matters under the provincial government in Victoria, and it should be recorded here that much valuable pioneering work was done in these years by the late John P. Babcock who headed that branch for most of his life. The present federal Department of Fisheries was established 28 years ago.

By the turn of the present century fisheries administration was becoming grooved into at least a semblance of the pattern of things to come. Fishery Officers were established at centres from the Naas to the Fraser. Federal fisheries headquarters for B.C. were established in New Westminster, and later moved to Vancouver.

Exactly 50 years ago the Fisheries Research Board of Canada established a station on the E.C. coast and the study of the various fish species indigenous to the area was begun in earnest. The Fisheries Research Board is the scientific arm of the Department and its main branches -- biology, technology and oceanography -- have played a very important part in the long term regulation and maintenance of the resource.

This union of scientific knowledge with practical administration is the basis of the Department of Fisheries' method of operation. Under the British North America Act the regulation of the fisheries of Canada is a federal responsibility, hence all British Columbia fishery laws come under federal statute. In the case of the B.C. salmon fisheries the federal Fisheries Act is the governing control. In addition to providing basic regulatory requirements it gives authority to the Governor General in Council -- in other words the Government of the day -- to promulgate detailed regulations to meet developing control and conservation needs of the various fisheries.

The importance and character of the salmon fisheries have made it necessary over the years to provide a fairly extensive set of basic regulations. These include such fundamentals as type, size and dimensions of fishing gear permissible, licensing requirements, prohibitions of various sorts including descriptions of prohibited areas, dates for opening and closing of fishing in the several areas, division of the coastal fishing grounds into areas for administrative and statistical purposes and so on.

To meet the day-to-day needs of vagaries and fluctuations of salmon runs throughout the extensive coastline, wide powers are bestowed on the Chief Supervisor of Fisheries and his

officers. These permit of 24-hour action by the local administration when emergency situations warrant.

Turning back to the fishery itself for a few moments, very significant changes have occurred in the past two decades. The application of electronic principles, a heritage of the first World War, resulted in a very sharp increase in the efficiency of the fishing fleets. When, for example, the echo sounder superseded the old piano wire "feeler" technique the problem of locating herring schools passed from trial and error into a matter of routine. Fishing boats became more mobile with the installation of radar and other aids. The radio telephone has brought added benefits both socially and economically. A great advance was made in the change-over from linen to nylon in the manufacture of gillnets.

This overall increase in the efficiency of fishing has brought its own peculiar problems. A healthy and prosperous fishing industry is, and always will be, the concern of the Department of Fisheries, but above all else it must place first in importance the conservation of the species. Without this there could be at best an uncertain future for the fishing industry, with the serious possibility that the millions of dollars invested in vessels, gear and plants would be slowly dissipated.

To maintain proper and sufficiently elastic regulation of the British Columbia fisheries, the Department of Fisheries has kept itself geared to the changing conditions of the fishery itself. Thus the rapid advances of recent years within the industry have their counterpart in the Department.

Since 1945 the Department has been completely reorganized. In the Pacific Area its basic field force of fishery officers has been recruited from veterans of the armed services. In most cases they have undergone an extensive training course before being assigned to their local areas. Behind these officers is a tightly knit group of specialists, under the Chief Supervisor of Fisheries in Vancouver, who are attached to individual special branches which have their headquarters in Ottawa.

One of the pressing problems besetting the Department today is the industrial expansion which has been taking place within the province for the past ten years, and its possible effect on the fisheries. In many cases plans for the construction or expansion of existing establishments such as pulpwood mills and other types threaten possible damage to fish runs in the locality, through the discharge of harmful chemical effluents. The constant demand for hydro-electric power poses an equally constant threat to fisheries.

For this reason one of the most important branches of the federal fisheries administration is the Conservation and Development Service. Its right wing is the protection branch which includes the field fishery officers and

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