

I visited British Columbia first in 1885. At that time there were only nine canners in the whole of British Columbia. I first became interested in the fishery business in 1890, at which time there were 32 canners operating in the whole of British Columbia, including 13 on the Fraser River. My company bought out seven of those canners on the Fraser River and two on the Skeena River. To-day all our canneries on the Fraser River are closed down on account of the depletion. The total average pack of sockeye for the last four years on the Fraser River was 32,000 cases as compared with the biggest pack in 1905, I think, of 837,000 cases. So you will see what a terrible depletion there has been. The situation cannot be looked upon as satisfactory from a business point of view. The reason for the collapse of the business on the Fraser River is a complicated one. Over fishing is undoubtedly responsible for the greater part of the depletion, and what was partly responsible was the blocking of the Fraser River for a period—I forget the date. I refer to the obstructions that were caused by the railway operations on the Fraser River, but I understand they have been very largely removed, and we are reliably informed now that the fish are able to ascend the river and reach their proper spawning beds. Unfortunately, if the fishing operations in Puget Sound and on the Fraser River are not restricted it is probable that the few salmon that are left will be further depleted. It is scarcely reasonable to expect that there will be any substantial improvement unless some very drastic measure is taken for the rehabilitation of the industry.

In the northern waters the depletion of the fisheries is going on apace. As many of you no doubt know, the provincial authorities in 1907-8 took the view that the British Columbia fisheries were not receiving sufficient attention from the Dominion Government in the interests of B.C., and they passed an Act for the purpose of controlling the fisheries with the idea of restricting operations so that they could depend upon the conservation. That Act provided that for a period of five years no more canneries should be built in those waters, as it was recognized then that there were more than enough already. I might mention first though that in 1905 a Royal Commission was appointed, of which Mr. Sweeney was the Chairman, and which reported strongly in favour of the restriction of the cannery licenses in order that the fisheries should not be depleted.

Mr. PUTNAM: What waters are excluded for the five years?

Mr. IRVING: I have not got that information.

Mr. PUTNAM: Did they include Puget Sound?

Mr. IRVING: No, the waters of British Columbia only.

The CHAIRMAN: Puget Sound is on the American side.

Mr. IRVING: Now I will refer to some of the restrictions. On page 23 of Mr. Evans' report it is pointed out that in the opinion of the British Columbia people they were not afforded sufficient protection. The report says:—

“The Provincial Department developed, for example, views upon the importance of limiting salmon fishing and canning licenses, which were at least more definite than those held by the Dominion authorities, and became disposed to take the initiative and to exercise a positive influence in the matter of restrictions.”

These regulations worked out very satisfactorily until they began to be broken. A little later on efforts were made to get outside of those restrictions, and in 1912, it is reported on page 26, they made a special clause in which special conditions were stipulated that only white fishermen should be employed by a certain canning firm, that a further license should be granted on the Skeena River; and it was on that understanding that this license was granted. It was thought to be a great departure for the benefit of the white fishermen that such a clause should be put in. It is rather noteworthy, and I want to bring it particularly to your notice now, that the

[Mr. H. Bell Irving.]