

Dominion Inspector's Report on Provincial Fisheries

Results of Season of 1918—Improving Fraser River Run—Different System of Licensing Suggested.

We are in receipt of the annual report of the Fisheries Branch of the Department of Naval Service for the year 1918. It is unfortunate that this report should be so long delayed as much of its public value is lost by reason of the statistics, now nearly two years old, have lost their interest and value to the business public or those directly or indirectly interested in the fishing business, except for historians and scientists. The report of Colonel F. H. Cunningham, chief inspector of Fisheries for the Province of British Columbia, is interesting reading, particularly with regard to his remarks concerning an increase in purse-seine licenses and fishing conservation. Colonel Cunningham says:

"The condition of the fishing industry as a whole may be considered satisfactory, although in some sections there was a falling off in the run of sockeye, notably in Rivers Inlet. It is not possible to give any specific reasons for the decrease of this variety in this particular area, especially as so little is known of the life history of the sockeye after they go out to sea as fry or fingerlings. There has been no increased fishing in this area since 1910, seven hundred boats being the allotment, and the hatchery on Owekano Lake has turned out its usual quota of fry yearly up to 1918, in which year the collection of eggs was considerably reduced.

"Some of the spawning streams are partially obstructed to the ascent of parent fish to their spawning grounds, but the removal of the obstructions is receiving attention, and the run of 1919 will have free access to the natural spawning grounds.

"There was an increased run of both sockeye and spring salmon on the Skeena River; the run of the latter species being a very agreeable surprise, as it was feared that these were on the down grade. Fortunately, however, the fish appeared as abundantly as in 1912-13, notwithstanding the added tax which was put on this species by the more extensive trolling operations.

"Pinks and chums were all over the province. Climatic conditions were good; prices paid to the fishermen were increased, and so far as the actual fishing operations were concerned the salmon fishing industry as a whole may be considered as having been very successful.

"The marketing of the finished article, owing to the war conditions of last fall, was not satisfactory. The greater proportion of red salmon, including pinks, was commandeered by the Government. Chums were not included and, as a consequence, there are unsold in the province, at the present time (June, 1919), probably 150,000 cases. It is hoped, however, that with the Peace terms signed and with the return of normal conditions an opportunity will offer for the disposition of this stock.

"The fishing for chum salmon on the west coast of Vancouver Island, in the area from Cape Beale to Sombrio Point, was most successful. Practically half the catch was exported to the United States, where it was canned and ultimately marketed in the southern states. The exportation of so much raw material from the province has been the subject of serious consideration, and there is much to be said both in favour of and against exportation. Those in favour of continued exportation point to the fact that the price received by the producers is greater than that which they would receive if they only had the home market in which to dispose of their catch. Those opposed to exportation point out that they are unable to pack and successfully compete in the southern markets owing to the duty of 15 per cent. On canned goods exported to the United States. Again, traps and seines are much in vogue in the United States for all varieties of salmon, hence the better

varieties are caught just as cheaply as other grades. This enables the American packer to pay a higher price for the raw product of the lower grades than the Canadian packer can afford to pay.

"This question was taken up fully by the Fisheries Commission of 1917, and it was recommended by them that exportation should be allowed to continue. It is, however, in the opinion of the undersigned, a trade worthy of further investigation, as it is certainly in the interests of this country that its raw material should be manufactured at home.

"The run of salmon to the Fraser River was, for even an off season, very poor. It is hoped that the work of the International Fisheries Commission will result in regulations that will assist nature in bringing back this fine salmon river to its normal state of production. It is felt that this work would be greatly assisted if, when the parent salmon ascending the streams of the Fraser River watershed had passed the commercial fishing boundary, they were allowed to ascend to their natural spawning grounds without any molestation whatever, either by Indians or others. Arrangements should be made to supply the Indians with fish food from the commercial run before the fish pass out of the commercial area. If this were done there is no doubt that a great improvement could reasonably be expected.

"Trolling for salmon as a commercial pursuit is gradually increasing. It gives the fishermen with limited capital an opportunity of entering the fishing industry on his own account, in a legitimate manner. The outlay is small and the returns are good. Some operators last season made from two to three thousand dollars. Spring salmon brought eight and nine cents per pound, and as high as 65 cents per fish was paid for coho. Of course, green hands could not expect to take up this phase of the fishing business and make such a complete success of it at the start. Like everything else, it needs experience, but it is an easy and legitimate way of fishing, and should offer good opportunities for returned soldiers whose condition calls for an outdoor life.

"The favorite trolling grounds are around Langara Islands, Dundas Island and Wark Canal, and on the west coast of Vancouver Island of Clayoquot and Barclay sounds, but there are other districts with more sheltered waters where trolling can be carried on remuneratively.

"The catch of herring shows an increase. Unfortunately, however, market conditions, following the signing of the armistice, were greatly changed. During the war the Canadian trade with the United States and Australia improved greatly owing to the lack of European supplies. This drew a number of inexperienced packers into the trade during the winter season of 1917-18, with the result that a large proportion of the output was badly cured. With the ending of hostilities and the expected immediate resumption of trading in herring with Europe, the demand for Canadian herring fell off in the United States and much of the poorly packed fish remained unsold.

"The whaling industry of 1918 was most successful. For the first time in the history of this industry in Canada whale meat was canned, nearly 30,000 cases being put up, and the commodity has found a ready market.

"The catch of halibut during 1918 was up to the normal average, and ranged in price from 15 cents to 20 cents per pound. Seven hundred and seventy-five cars of this species left Prince Rupert over the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway during the year.

"There were the same complaints during the season of scarcity of bait, but two or three attempts were made by individuals to establish retaining ponds for herring which could be sold fresh as bait to the halibut fishermen. Reports indicate that this has proved successful and it will no doubt tend in a certain measure to relieve the situation.