

FAUNA INSPECTION

The Fauna Warden, Mr. G.C. Jeffery, carried out an inspection of the Bunbury - Capel - Busselton districts, from May 2 - 5. Many Road Board and Farmers' Union Secretaries, police officers and honorary wardens were interviewed, but he received very few complaints. Land owners seemed very well satisfied with the existing licensing provisions for dealing with trouble from kangaroos, and an open season for this species is apparently not required.

Several farmers did complain, however, of bronzewing pigeons being destructive at seeding time in the clover paddocks, and have requested an open season. Other reports have been received on this matter, and it is said that bronzewings have a decided preference for albino clover seed and cause considerable damage. The Fauna Protection Advisory Committee will give consideration to the request for an open season at its next meeting.

Up to the time of Mr. Jeffery's visit very little rain had fallen in the district compared with the floods elsewhere. Ducks and other water-fowl were scarce, the majority having left after the February rains.

WESTERN AUSTRALIA'S WHALING INDUSTRY

The State might possibly be in danger of losing an industry now worth nearly £A1,000,000 annually if some brake were not applied to the taking of humpback whales on the Western Australian coast, said the Minister for Fisheries (Mr. Kelly) recently.

He was commenting on the action of the Commonwealth Government in reducing the annual quota for this State from 1320 to 1120 whales.

Humpback whales which visited the coast during the winter spent the summer in the Antarctic seas in an area almost due south of Cape Leeuwin, said Mr. Kelly. Hunting for humpbacks was carried on in the Antarctic as well as on our coasts, so it was

a relatively simple matter to follow changes in the humpback population by analysing catch figures for both the Antarctic and eastern Indian Ocean waters. This had been done.

Research over recent years had shown that there had been changes within the group of humpbacks upon which Western Australian whaling concerns operated. The main points arising from this research and the catch analysis were -

- * Males have always predominated in the catches in this State, but the take of females has risen from 29% of the total in 1949 to 47% in 1954;
- * The size of both males and females in the catches in the Antarctic and local waters has declined. In 1949 the average length of males taken in Western Australian waters was 40 ft. 4 in., while in 1954 it had been reduced to 38 ft. 9 in. The females dropped from 41 ft. 5 in. in 1949 to 40 ft. 6 in. in 1954. In the Antarctic the equivalents were 39 ft. 6 in. (1949/50) and 38 ft. 10 in. (1953/54) for males and 41 ft. 2 in. (1949/50) and 39 ft. 9 in. (1953/54) for females.
- * Some of the whales taken, although in excess of the minimum legal length fixed by international agreement (35 ft.), were immature, i.e., they were too young to breed. It probably does not matter if some immatures are killed, provided the escapement is sufficient to maintain the brood stocks at a sufficiently high level. The catch figures have shown, however, that more and more immature whales have been taken each year in both the Antarctic and Western Australia.

"These facts," concluded Mr. Kelly "are such as to give some concern, not only to the Federal and State Governments, but also to the whaling companies themselves. The trends indicated are highly unfavourable towards the maintenance of the stocks, and if unchecked could constitute a serious threat to the industry."