

Dr. Robert Carrick, also a Principal Research Officer of the C.S.I.R.O. Wildlife Survey Section, is at present visiting Western Australia from Canberra, where his headquarters are located. While he has been in Perth, Dr. Carrick, who is the officer in charge of the Australian Bird-Banding Scheme, has called on the Superintendent, and spent some days on Rottnest Island at the Biological Station there. He left on June 28 for Woodstock, near Port Hedland, and from there will go on to the Agriculture Department's Kimberley Research Station, and finally to Darwin. His visit to the Kimberleys is to study the onslaughts of birds like cockatiels, finches, wild ducks and geese on the station's experimental rice plot, where their depredations are quite serious. He will see the extent of the damage done and seek to advise on methods of control.

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A caller at Head Office during June was Mr. Soemartono, a graduate of the Agricultural College, Bogor, Indonesia, and an officer of the Food Research Laboratory, Djakarta. Mr. Soemartono is visiting Australia under a Colombo Plan scholarship, and has already completed a two-year post-graduate course in food technology at the N.S.W. University of Technology in Sydney. Mr. Soemartono, who is specialising in fish processing, will spend five weeks in this State. It is his intention to inspect as many fish processing plants as possible during that time. He has already been to Albany, where he visited Hunt's Cannery, the Cheyne Beach Whaling Company's shore station and the Albany-Denmark Fishermen's Co-operative. He will go next to Geraldton, and on his return spend a week or two in the metropolitan area before moving on to Brisbane and Sydney. He has already visited Victoria, Tasmania and South Australia. Mr. Soemartono expects to return to Indonesia towards the end of the current year.

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DISTRICT INSPECTORS' MID-YEAR CONFERENCE

The annual mid-year conference of district inspectors was this year held at Bunbury from June 15 to 17. Those present were the Superintendent, who

presided, and Messrs. B.R. Saville (Clerk-in-Charge, Head Office), J.E. Bramley (Supervising Inspector), J.E. Munro (Senior Inspector), W. Davidson (Fremantle), H.J. Murray (Mandurah), S.W. Bowler (Geraldton), A.K. Melsom (Relieving Inspector), A.V. Green (Albany), N.E. McLaughlan (Shark Bay) and J.L. Gallop (Bunbury).

In his opening remarks the Superintendent said that he regarded these mid-year conferences, which had been introduced four years ago, as most valuable from the point of view of the administration and, he hoped, of the district inspectors also. The district inspectors were really the eyes and ears of the Department; it was they who kept Head Office informed in relation to developments in their respective districts and permitted the Department to keep its ear to the ground, as it were; and it was they who in the final analysis were responsible for carrying departmental policy into effect, as they were the men who were in constant touch with the people in the industry. He said he regarded the district inspectors' conference as a sort of policy-making convention. The district inspectors, being in actual contact with every part of the industry, were undoubtedly in a better position to appreciate the impact that any policy decision made on the industry. Their advice, offered not only during conference discussions, but also conveyed to departmental executives in a more or less informal manner in off-the-record talks, was given considerable weight in the determination of departmental policy. The conference also provided the senior inspectorial staff with an opportunity of getting to know their colleagues better. The mid-year conferences were held in each district in rotation, so that all officers could get to know what sort of a job all the other officers had to do. He said he felt that for the proper administration of the Department it was desirable that every senior officer had at least a passing knowledge of the problems of all districts. He welcomed to their first conference Mr. McLaughlan, who was the first cadet appointed under the training scheme initiated some five years ago, and now at the unusually early age of 22 years had been appointed as inspector in charge of the most remote of all the fisheries districts (Shark Bay), and Mr. Gallop, who had recently been promoted to inspector in charge of the Bunbury district after some years' service as assistant inspector at Mandurah and elsewhere. He hoped that they

would gain much benefit and enjoyment from their first district inspectors' meeting. He felt sure they would derive much personal satisfaction, as he himself had done, from their association with the Fisheries Department and the fishing industry in general.

The Superintendent referred to the Maritime Pollution Committee which had been established to advise the Government as to steps which should be taken to combat oil and other pollution on beaches, harbours, etc. He said he was a member of the Committee. The scope of the Committee's activities would not at the moment include the pollution of the Swan River or other estuaries. The members felt that investigations should be limited to oil pollution of coastal waters. It had secured information on the subject from various sources in Australia and overseas. The implementation of any oil pollution legislation in respect to extra-territorial waters would need to be discussed with the Commonwealth Government. At present it appeared that laws concerning oil pollution of Australian coastal waters could be made by the Commonwealth Parliament. He asked inspectors to report any occurrences of oil pollution in ports and harbours in their respective districts.

Mr. Fraser stated that the Minister had decided not to introduce a Bill to amend the Fisheries Act during the coming session of Parliament.

He said that for some time it had been apparent that the fish known locally as silver or sand whiting was referable to more than one species. For example, fish taken in more northerly latitudes, e.g., Shark Bay, appeared to reach a larger size at maturity than those in more southerly waters. The administration of the law in respect to the legal minimum length at which the fish may be taken was in consequence becoming more difficult, and it had been arranged for Mr. B.K. Bowen, of Head Office, who is at present undergoing a course in Zoology at the University, to carry out a project to sort out the seven or eight different species of whiting occurring along our coast. This would involve vertebrae, gill-raker and scale counts. Mr. Gilbert P. Whitley, Curator of Fishes at the Australian Museum, Sydney, had agreed to assist in identifying the species. To carry out the project, Mr. Bowen would require 25 to

30 of each species of whiting from each district, and the assistance of inspectors was necessary to secure the specimens. The method of holding the fish and subsequent transport to Perth would be left to the inspectors themselves. Queries on any point should be referred to Mr. Bowen, who would make available suitable cans and formalin as required.

Mr. Fraser referred to the excellent work being done by officers of the C.S.I.R.O. Division of Fisheries. He said much of their research was undertaken at the Department's request. In that sense, therefore, any assistance rendered to C.S.I.R.O. by the Department's field staff was work done for the Department. It was his desire that the help given by the Department be not in any sense grudging or niggardly, and he wanted officers to put themselves out, if necessary, to assist C.S.I.R.O. personnel. In recent months, in accordance with C.S.I.R.O. policy, a number of research officers had been withdrawn and one or two others were under instructions to return to headquarters at Cronulla. This was a policy decision with which we could not find fault, because the personnel in question had either completed the specific tasks they had been set, or else were on the point of completing them. There was a number of problems in Western Australia still requiring attention by research people, he said, but these were of a more or less domestic nature, and as soon as Mr. Bowen had completed his Zoology training, and received appointment as research officer, he would be assigned to these problems. The more important were fish-farming, fauna conservation and the deterioration of the pearl-shell at Shark Bay.

The following are résumés of some of the subjects discussed -

Amateur Crayfishermen's License :

It was recommended that the Fisheries Act Regulations be amended to provide for the issue of a license for the taking of crayfish by amateurs. The general opinion was that the holder of any such license should be restricted to the use of not more than two craypots.

Restriction of Drop Nets :

It was agreed that some limit should be placed on the number of drop nets which might be used by any one person for the purpose of taking crabs, and a recommendation was made accordingly.

Commonwealth Fisheries Act Licenses :

Each inspector reported that he had explained to local fishermen the requirements of the Commonwealth law, but in no case except Bunbury had any approach been made for the issue of a Commonwealth license. The Superintendent said that in correspondence between the Minister for Fisheries in this State and the appropriate Commonwealth Minister, it had been tacitly agreed that inspectors would issue any Commonwealth license applied for, but that they would not be required to seek out fishermen who failed to take out any such license.

Marine Act, 1948-1953 :

A general discussion took place on the provisions of the new Marine Act manning regulations, which require that fishing-boat skippers hold a ticket, and the effect they may have on fishermen who have expended large sums of money on fishing equipment and are not yet naturalised. It was decided to recommend that the matter be taken up with the Harbour and Light Department, with a view to a competent skipper who was otherwise qualified but not eligible for naturalisation being granted a provisional ticket pending naturalisation, such ticket to be withdrawn if naturalisation were not secured within a reasonable time of the holder becoming eligible.

Yellow-eye Mullet :

Several officers were of the opinion that the legal length of yellow-eye mullet should be increased from 9 to 9½ inches, not because fish at this length were immature, but because of the poor marketability of 9" fish. It was decided to recommend that the views of the various fishermen's associations be sought before taking the matter further.

Marron :

It was agreed to recommend that the taking of marron by any means of capture whatsoever during the close season be prohibited. At present only certain methods of fishing were banned, and this, it was felt, left open too many avenues for evasion of the law.

Open Waters for Duck Shooting :

It was the general opinion of district inspectors that more waters should be open for duck shooting during the open season. Areas specifically mentioned were the northern end of Leschenault Inlet (Bunbury), the Murchison River and parts of the Serpentine lake system within the boundaries of the Mandurah and Rockingham Road Districts.

The Superintendent said he would discuss the matter with the Fauna Protection Advisory Committee at an early meeting.

Closed Waters Generally :

The Superintendent mentioned that with the ever-increasing road traffic, more and more beach areas were being developed as camping resorts for tourists. The Department had been literally inundated with applications from people running these camps for the closure of the beaches fronting their respective properties against the use of fishing-nets. Although such applications, which were rarely based on any sound appreciation of fishery conservation practice, usually received short shrift, they were nevertheless somewhat embarrassing, and the Department would soon be compelled to define some sort of policy. The matter was discussed at considerable length, and although it was acknowledged that anglers had a common law right of fishery, the intention of the statute law was that if stocks of fish were to be conserved, they were to be conserved for the professional fishermen, who were the only class of people engaged in fishing for the provision of food for the public at large. In any case, as the majority of the fish frequenting the beaches were migratory by nature, the closure against netting of one small area of coastline would have no beneficial effect. If fish were

present to be caught by nets, they were there to be caught by line also. One of the difficulties seemed to be that the camp proprietors regarded the availability of fish as a good advertising medium, and it induced people to visit the area. They were not all good anglers, however, and did not always understand the habits of fish. Despite this, if their catches were not good, it was not their lack of ability that was blamed, but always the activities of professional net-fishermen. No final decision was made in regard to this vexed question.

General :

In reply to enquiries by inspectors, Mr. Saville said that if delays occurred in the payment of accounts for travelling expenses, mileage, etc., the fault did not lie with Head Office. If monthly dairies were sent in time to reach Head Office not later than the 2nd or 3rd of the following month, and all necessary certificates were signed, they should receive a cheque by about the 15th of the month. However, many such claims had to be sent back to inspectors for signature or for some other purpose, and that was how delays came about. In regard to local purchases of petrol, oil, etc., for an officer's vehicle, if the duplicate orders were not in hand when the monthly claims were ready to pass for payment, the appropriate deductions could not be made and the vouchers would not be passed.

Mr. Bramley said that inspectors should always aim for efficiency. He said that district inspectors had a great responsibility in training assistants and cadets under their control, and unless they themselves were efficient and displayed interest in their work, they could scarcely expect the juniors to learn their job properly.

Next Mid-Year Meeting :

The Superintendent announced that the next mid-year conference would take place at Mandurah in June, 1956.