

ANNUAL INSPECTORS' CONFERENCE.

In the September issue of this Bulletin, on pages 125 and 126, we published a brief summary of the proceedings on the opening day of the 16th Annual Conference of Inspectors. Hereunder is a summary of the reports and discussions of the two final days of the conference.

Fauna Section.

Fauna Warden S. W. Bowler outlined the patrols he had undertaken during the year in the South-West, Great Southern, Midlands, and Kimberley districts. He also reported highlights of tours of inspection of some of the islands of the Recherche Archipelago and when in company with the Fauna Protection Advisory Committee on its tour through the Great Southern, Esperance, Duke of Orleans Bay and Kalgoorlie Goldfields districts.

Reviewing the increase in policing activities brought about by the inception of the cage bird and pet food trades, Mr. Bowler said that the number of licenses issued had increased markedly compared with the previous twelve months. This referred particularly to bird trappers and dealers' export and import licenses. Mr. Bowler forecast that in the foreseeable future it would be necessary to introduce limits on the number of finches that might be taken by any trapper and to restrict the number of trappers who might operate. He considered that the present open season for kangaroos had enabled mass destruction methods to be adopted. This had reduced the numbers of these animals in some districts to such low proportions that he thought it would be many years before they would become a nuisance again. Before concluding his report, Mr. Bowler dealt with the number of his miscellaneous duties including co-operation of Honorary Wardens, bird banding activities and the nursing of giant petrels blown ashore during winter gales.

The Fauna Protection officer, Mr. Shugg briefly explained the administration of the Fauna Protection Act. He pointed out that in addition to the policing activities generally covered by the Fauna Warden, the Department was charged with ensuring that all possible steps be taken to conserve and preserve sections of our native fauna for economic, aesthetic and scientific purposes. He pointed out that it was generally accepted these days that only preservation of the habitat, and its maintenance in near-natural condition, could ensure the survival of the species.

An active policy in establishing sanctuaries was being prosecuted, and at present a total of 85 such areas comprising  $2\frac{3}{4}$  million acres were so set aside. After outlining some of the steps necessary in the management and control of sanctuaries, a series of coloured slides of Dale's Gorge in the Hamersley Ranges was shown.

#### Inspection Section.

Senior Inspector J. E. Munro said that he was glad to report the occupation of the new Perth district office and boatshed at Ellam Street, Victoria Park. The offices were occupied in November, and subsequently a jetty and ramp for the care of the Department's small craft had been completed. It was a building of which the Department could be truly proud.

Commenting on his patrol activities, Mr. Munro drew attention to the increased crayfish production brought about by the augmented number of men and boats in the industry, and said that the conservation and protection of the crayfishing grounds was becoming progressively more necessary and more difficult. In the Rockingham-Long Point area, where his activities at the beginning of the year had been mainly centred, a considerable traffic in undersize crayfish was discovered, and a constant watch of both amateur and professional fishermen had become necessary. Later patrols had been carried out on the northern beaches at Lancelin, Ledge Point and Cape Leschenault. He said that he regarded the illegal traffic in the Ledge Point area to be sufficiently serious to warrant the appointment of a full-time patrol.

Commenting upon developments in the industry, Mr. Munro referred to the introduction of wire netting covered mild steel framed craypots, which had proved their efficacy. He said that there was every possibility of the well-known fish merchants, Messrs. Kailis Bros., entering the processing field in the coming season. He understood that this firm had made arrangements to buy from fishermen in the Yanchep-Two Rocks area and further afield. He thought the crayfish would be processed at a West Perth site. Mr. Munro said that the present trend of departmental stores, butchers and supermarkets to handle processed fish, was causing a change in the distribution pattern. Fish hawkers who had once operated in most suburbs had almost disappeared, and fish shops were feeling the pinch of competition. They seemed to have no idea of countering the inroads made in their field by their new competitors. Referring to his general activities, Mr. Munro regretted that no schools of any duration had been held.

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Senior Inspector A. K. Malsom, reporting on activities in the Fremantle district, said that 660 professional fishermen's licenses, 245 amateur net fishermen's licenses and 288 fishing-boat licenses, had been issued in 1958. The value of the fleet now exceeded £1,000,000, including the value of two new freezer boats, the Zora and the Liza, each valued at about £15,000. This, he said, brought the total number of freezer boats operating out of Fremantle to 22. In addition, Commonwealth fishing-boat and fishermen's licenses to the value of £316 were issued. Mr. Malsom said that a short but sharp white crayfish season had resulted in the production of over 4 million lb in the Fremantle district. More than half this amount had been landed at the fish market jetty and the breakwater landing. The herring season had opened well and good catches were taken during the first week in May. The price quickly dropped from 8d. to 4d. lb, however, and fishermen stopped fishing.

Inspector R. M. Crawford reported that 330 professional fishermen's licenses and 322 fishing boat licenses had been issued in the Geraldton district. Included in the latter were several new large boats which had been added to the fleet. During the 12 months, he said, 7 fishing boats had been lost but fortunately no loss of life had occurred. He valued the Geraldton fishing fleet at £400,000. Revenue from licenses was £1,731.

The 1958 crayfishing season in the Geraldton-Abrolhos area had been a record and the Geraldton Fishermen's Co-operative, he said, was doing exceptionally well with over 60% of the fishermen being shareholders. Although the price of crayfish dropped from 2/7 to 2/4, the Co-operative's turnover was £267,000. The co-op. had installed four new cookers and employed 110 processors at the peak of the season. The Co-operative was now exploring the market in the U.S. for whole cooked crayfish.

Mr. Crawford also commented on the fauna in the Geraldton district, listing the species which were commonly seen and describing their relative abundance. In concluding his report, he said that the district had expanded to the point where it was impossible for one inspector to administer it properly. He pointed out that with 400 fishermen and over 200 boats to supervise, and 200 miles of coast to patrol it was too much for one senior inspector and one junior inspector. He recommended that a further senior resident inspector be appointed.

Inspector N. E. MacLaughlan advised that 47 boats and 34 fishermen were licensed in 1958 in the Shark Bay district. These men produced 947,000 lb. of fish, while visiting fishermen took 840,000 lb from Shark Bay waters. The principal species caught were snapper, mullet and whiting. Crayfish totalling 126,533 lb. had also been taken in the comparatively new grounds. He said that there had been no depletion in fish stocks, although the catch was a little less than in the previous year. He attributed the decline to the marketing situation, and pointed out that where only one freezer was really necessary, four were actually operating, each with their own transport. The six small crayfish boats working from South Passage in the period January-August had taken their catches to a processing plant at Denham, and 8 freezer boats had also fished the grounds during the year. Catches were generally poor, which forced the smaller boats to move out and consequently the processing factory closed down.

Concluding his report, Mr. McLaughlan described highlights of his visit to the eastern States on long service leave. In addition to calling at the Fisheries Departments of all States (with the exception of South Australia) and at the Commonwealth Fisheries Office, Canberra, Mr. McLaughlan also visited Bundaberg, Queensland, where he looked at the prawn and scallop fisheries, the C.S.I.R.O. Laboratories at Cronulla, the oyster beds in the Hawkesbury and George's Rivers, the trout hatchery at Jindabyne in the Snowy Mountains area, and also the fish cannery at Eden, N.S.W.

Inspector T. B. Baines, of Bunbury, reported that 68 fishing-boat licenses and 80 professional fishermen's licenses had been issued in the Bunbury district in 1958. Fishermen there had enjoyed a profitable year. Good hauls of trevally (skipjack), tailer and buffalo bream had been made. The 1958-59 season had also been a good one for crabs, and cobbler had been plentiful in June, July and August, he said. Buffalo bream had been sold as crayfish bait for 6d. lb., and cobbler heads had once again been easy to quit as crayfish bait. Mr. Baines advised that yellow-eye mullet had also been plentiful in the estuary. Patrols concerned with the protection of marron had been carried out, he said, at the Wellington and Stirling dams. These crustaceans did not appear to have been plentiful at either place.

Commenting on the fauna of the district, Mr. Baines mentioned the more common species, and said that the wild duck open season had got away to a bad start, as heavy rains inland had attracted the ducks away from the coast. They did not return until late in the season. Kangaroos appeared to be plentiful in the Augusta-Margaret River area.

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Inspector B. A. Carmichael dealt first with the whaling season experienced by the Cheynes Beach Whaling Co. The 1958 humpback season had again been very disappointing, even more so than in the previous year, Mr. Carmichael said. Only 82 humpbacks were taken, 20 less than in 1957, so that barely more than half the quota of 120 had been secured. The company had experienced a series of unfortunate incidents culminating in the chaser Kos VII losing its propeller whilst engaged in hunting operations. Captain Hughes had the misfortune to fall and break an arm while in charge of the chaser "Cheynes". Mr. Carmichael advised that only four pregnant humpback cows had been taken during the season, compared with 14 in the previous year. He said that pregnant cows were usually the last to pass through Albany waters during the run, and he thought it a pity their condition could not be recognised.

Dealing with sperm whaling, Mr. Carmichael reported that 209 sperms had been taken in the season from April 10 to December 16. During June, July and August, the chasers had concentrated on humpbacks so that in effect the sperm season covered only six months of the year. In December, the price of sperm oil dropped to an uneconomic price and the company suspended operations.

Speaking of fish production, Mr. Carmichael advised that the salmon catch had shown an increase over that of the previous year, but tommy roughs (sea herring) had decreased by about 87,000 lb. He suggested that this could have been due to the cannery taking only a limited quantity, as the canned and filleted product did not seem to sell as well as salmon. He also described his patrols, and fishing conditions along the coast to Broke Inlet in the west, where production decreased in 1958, and to Esperance in the east. He also made reference to the apparently increased numbers of grey kangaroos appearing in the district and to his bird observations. These included sightings of banded giant petrels and quail. Only one petrel in the white phase had been seen, he said.

Assistant Inspector H. D. Kavanagh described his work in the patrol vessels "Silver Gull" and "Misty Isle", and some of his experiences at Rottnest Island and Houtman's Abrolhos areas. He referred to the inspections necessary to ensure that regulations relating to the setting of pots, closed waters and the taking of crayfish were enforced.

He also commented on the dumping of 140 bags of dead crayfish by "Miss Phoenix" during the white crayfish run in December. Although processers and crews had worked until 5 in

the morning, it had not been possible to cope with the catches brought in by the catcher boats. In an effort to avoid further wastage, a voluntary limit was set on the number of bags that a catcher boat could bring in for processing. This resulted in some of the catcher boats having to leave half their pots unpulled, but they continued to bring in more than their quota, hoping to have it processed. Consequently, some 40,000 lb. of legal size crayfish had been dumped in a period of four days. The white crayfish, he said had "run" for approximately fourteen days.

Inspector E. I. Forster delivered a complementary report on patrols aboard the "Misty Isle" and later as skipper of the "Silver Gull". Mr. Forster also reported on a new development in the Fremantle fishery, viz., the trawling of squid and cuttlefish in the waters of Cockburn Sound.

Mr. J. E. Bramley, Supervising Inspector, outlined the material he would like to see included in reports and diaries, and the manner in which they should be submitted. He also called for additional information from inspectors of their observations of fish and fauna occurrences, and the names of fishermen working in areas patrolled and the gear they used. He said it was important that when reporting breaches, the Crown Law Department's form of brief be completed in detail. The surname and full christian names of every person apprehended, and their home address (not their working address) should be ascertained and reported. This, he pointed out, would save the Department time and make it easier for the Police Department to serve summonses. Mr. Bramley also drew attention to the necessity for reporting any malpractices observed, so that a direction could be given on action to be taken.

He asked District Inspectors to ensure that the boundaries of closed waters were clearly marked, and called on crews of patrol boats to assist District Inspectors at all times. It was a patrol boat's function to assist the administration of the district in which it was working, particularly in regard to such matters as the collection of fishermen's returns and reporting the names of boats and the men fishing in the areas they patrolled.

#### Pearling.

Pearling Inspector R. J. Baird advised that the 1958 season had ended with the take of pearlshell 288 tons less than that of the previous year. Three hundred and ninety-four pearl fishers were engaged in the industry, he said, 16 being European, 38 full blood natives, 11 halfcasts, 115 Japanese, and 214 Indo-

nesians, Malays and Chinese. Only 14 professional fishermen's licenses had been issued during the year, and poor fishing had been experienced. He attributed this to the hot weather experienced and the higher water temperatures which prevented fish from penetrating into Roebuck Bay. Indeed, the fish were so scarce that the fishermen were forced to give up fishing. Referring to the Pearls Pty. Ltd's pearl culturing venture at Kuri Bay, Mr. Baird reported that the first harvest had been successful and culture pearls of fine quality had been recovered. He said that while no definite valuation of the Australian cultured pearl had been decided, it was thought that the price for a top grade cultured pearl would be about one-third of the value of a good natural pearl. The Kuri Bay product was superior to the Japanese and was a lot larger - the Australian cultured pearl ranging in size from 50-90 grains, whereas the best Japanese pearl was about 40 grains.

Referring to the fauna patrol carried out during August and September with Warden S.W. Bowler, Mr. Baird said it had been a very interesting experience and a good deal of information had been obtained about the fauna of the Kimberley region. Unfortunately, he added, one of his strongest impressions was the "don't care" attitude of the majority of station owners towards the fauna, and their lack of hospitality. Mr. Baird concluded his address with the showing of selected slides on the pearling and pearl culture industries.

#### Research Section.

Mr. B. K. Bowen, Research officer, summarised the research projects his section had in hand. These were the set-net experiments being carried out in Mandurah waters, fertilisation of farm dams and limnological studies thereon, fertility and mortality rates in the trout hatcheries at Pemberton, and prawn and scallop testing at Exmouth Gulf and Shark Bay.

He then briefly described an ecological survey of Bernier and Dorre Islands, the first of its kind carried out under the auspices of the Department. The survey, he said, had been undertaken to give the Fauna Protection Advisory Committee information on the needs of the fauna of the island, so that it could make recommendations to the Minister in respect of an application to lease parts of the islands for tourist purposes. Mr. Bowen led the survey party, other members of which were Dr. W. D. L. Ride, Director, Dr. G. F. Mees, Curator of Birds, and Mr. A. M. Douglas, Entomologist, of the W.A. Museum; Mr. R. D. Royce, Senior Botanist, Department of Agriculture; and Mr. H. Tindale-

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Biscoe, Department of Zoology, University of W.A. The party was landed first on Dorre Island, and later on Bernier Island, having been transported from Carnarvon on the research vessel "Lancelin" under the command of Assistant Inspector D. Wright, with Inspector N.E. MacLaughlan as sailing master and Mr. C.R.C. Haines as mate. Mr. Bowen went on to show slides to illustrate the flora and fauna of the island, specimens of which proved to be most interesting, including some species believed to be new to science. He said that a complete report was being prepared and would be published in due course.

Captain H.C.W. Piesse outlined r.v. "Lancelin's" activities in prawn and scallop surveys of the waters of the nearer North-West, and Technical officer R. J. McKay showed slides and described the activities of commercial trawlers on the prawning grounds.

Technical officer L. G. Smith summarised the results of his year's activities in bream tagging, the set-net experiments at Mandurah and trout transport and liberation.

Technical officer J. S. Simpson outlined the survey work on farm dams.

#### Whaling.

Assistant Inspector D. Wright described operations at the Nor'West Whaling Co.'s station at Babbage Island, Carnarvon, in 1958. The season was in full swing by July 7, he said, with catches of from 7 to 19 whales a day. The best day's catch was 20 on July 10, and the best weekly catch was 120 for the week ended July 10. The whales were all in good condition, the blubber being up to 8" in thickness. Smaller whales approximately 35-38ft in length were found to be plentiful in the Shark Bay area, and their blubber and meat proved to be in excellent condition. In mid-August, Mr. Wright continued, the daily catches became smaller, and although blubber measurements were about the same, the quality deteriorated, becoming more fibrous. By the beginning of September, the catches of larger whales had dropped off, the catcher boats reporting numbers of cows with calves, and small whales of about 36 feet. By October 1 the weekly catch was very poor and a large number of the Station's staff was dismissed. By October 19, only an odd cow and calf were sighted, and the season officially closed on October 21.



In the total catch were a blue whale and 3 bryde whales. When the first of the latter was brought in by the catcher "Manilya", it was thought to be a sei or minke whale. Measurements were made of the fins, jaw, baleen, ovaries, and ear plugs, and samples of the stomach contents were taken and sent to C.S.I.R.O. headquarters at Cronulla. There they were positively identified as bryde whales. They were grey in colour and cigar shaped, with short flippers and thick tough baleen, dark in colour with very coarse hairs. Mr. Wright said that in the first two, fish were packed tightly in the throat and baleen. These were quite fresh.

Dealing with the station's treatment plant, Mr. Wright reported that the special equipment designed to treat whale blood to add more protein to the meal had been continually blocked by rubbish, e.g., bagging, pieces of baleen, shrapnel and bone from the deck. These had caused overflow in the blood drains and treatment was abandoned. Seven whale marks had been recovered, four of them being of Russian origin. Information subsequently received revealed that the latter had been fired into whales about 2,000 miles south-west of Fremantle while the other three marks had been fired from the "Warreen" and "Lancelin".

Another interesting point mentioned by Mr. Wright was the occurrence of giant petrels in the area, including a banded bird in the white phase. The catching of large quantities of mullet by fishing line with congealed blood as bait, and the appearance of several dugongs feeding in the shallows off the station jetty were other items of interest. He said that a cow and a calf were often observed around the end of the season near the catwalk of the jetty, and appeared not in the least afraid of swimmers, some men getting close enough to touch the cow. Mr. Wright concluded his report with a comprehensive list of the avifauna and complete details of hunting and production statistics. Finally, he showed a selection of coloured slides.

#### General Business.

Among the many items of general business discussed, the following may be considered to be of particular moment:-

Inspector N. E. MacLaughlan requested that fish traps be banned in the waters of Shark Bay. He said he was not concerned with the use of traps in waters outside the Bay, but only within the Bay itself where snapper were localised. He thought it would not take long for them to be trapped out. He also pointed out that snapper fishing was a very popular sport with anglers, whose sport could be completely ruined. The Director said he would arrange for the "Lancelin" to investigate the effects of using fish traps and the taking of snapper.

Senior Inspector J. E. Munro requested that a patrol boat be stationed at Ledge Point where, he said, some fishermen were operating in close season and apparently were determined to defy the Department. The Director refused the request, as it was considered better use could be made of the available staff by the formation of a flying squad. A suggestion by the Fauna Warden (Mr. Bowler) that a permanent station be established at Lancelin Island was refused for the same reason.

The Research Officer (Mr. Bowen) requested that the Fisheries regulations be reprinted to enable members of the staff and members of the public to obtain copies. He also suggested that the annual inspector's conference be held at a set time each year. The Director said he would review the regulations on his return from annual leave. After some discussion it was agreed that future conferences be held in the spring.

Senior Inspector J. E. Munro, supported by Inspector J. Traynor, requested that penalties for breaches of the Fisheries Act be increased. The Director advised that he had discussed this matter with the Minister who had indicated that he would prefer to introduce amending legislation for this purpose only in conjunction with other important amendments.

#### Conclusion.

Before closing the conference, the Director outlined possible and desirable developments in the industry. It was proposed at Geraldton to establish a fishermen's centre, including a multi-cradle slip, a new jetty and a landing of some sort. A road was also required with parking facilities. At Fremantle, where harbour facilities for fishing craft were admittedly the worst on the coast, there was a big scheme in hand to enlarge the fishing boat harbour. It was planned to provide a sheltered area of some 76 acres.

The Director asked that all members of the staff put forward any suggestions they might have for the improvement of the industry and the administration of the Department. He referred to the growth of the Department in recent years and the fine spirit which he said had always permeated the staff and which, he was sure, would continue as all appeared to have a desire to see the industry grow and prosper.

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He thanked all officers for the great support he had received in the past. He said that the staff should not take it as a personal affront if all their suggestions and recommendations were not carried into effect. He himself was in the same situation at times. The Minister did not always accept his recommendations, as was his privilege, but he (the Director) lost no sleep over it. What must be appreciated was that the Director was sometimes in a better position to see all sides of a question than individual members of the staff. That should not, however, stop the staff from presenting their point of view at all times.