

Rescue Services. Following a recommendation by a Fisheries Committee a life boat the "Sirima" was constructed in 1945 by the Colombo Port Commission boatyard. Due to war-time shortages this boat was used to transport fish from islands off Kalpitiya to Kalpitiya from where the fish could be sent on to Colombo. Two vessels were constructed in 1949 the "Kunissa" and the "Halmessa" for the dual role of rescue work and normal fishing. The lack of suitable anchorages in most areas and the profitless expenditure on maintenance were overcome by sending the boats out fishing along with local craft. Two patrol launches capable of rescue work and fishing were constructed in 1950.

When a report of missing boats or men is given in at the Police Station nearest the home of the fishermen the message is sent through Police Headquarters by telephone or wireless to the Air Force, the Director of Fisheries and the Master Attendant of the Colombo Port Commission. The Master Attendant's Department informs all ships in the neighbourhood of the reported accident and the Air Force sends out search aircraft. The Fisheries boats and launches are also sent out when necessary. During 1956, 23 distress calls were received from various parts of the Island.

5. LEGISLATION

Regulations. One of the earliest aspects of fisheries administration was the necessity of making fisheries laws to settle or avoid fishing disputes and to prevent destructive methods of fishing. These laws were formed under the various Ordinances existing at the time such as the Game Protection, Municipal Councils, Local Government, Local Boards, Village Committees and Small Towns Sanitary Ordinances.

This scattered array of fishing regulations was found in practice to be either vague or not uniform in character and so a new set of laws was drafted and enacted as the Fisheries Ordinance, No. 24 of 1940. This Ordinance provided for registration of craft, prohibition of dynamiting or poisoning of fish or the destruction of gear and the restriction of export of certain fish and eggs. It established a Fisheries Advisory Board and invested the Minister of Fisheries with the power of making new regulations, while it kept in force many laws and concessions made under the previous regulations.

In the course of the administration of the Ordinance it was found that amendments became necessary. The Fisheries Amendment Act, No. 17 of 1950, controlled the kinds of nets used for the further protection of young fish and eggs. The Amendment Act, No. 25 of 1952, made it possible to refer a fishing dispute for public inquiry, enhanced the punishment for destructive fishing and established a Fisheries Reward Fund from sale of confiscated goods and fines in order to reward informants and witnesses against dynamiters. The Amendment Act, No. 30 of 1956, made it an offence to knowingly possess or expose for sale dynamited or poisoned fish, widened the scope of matters referred for public inquiry and gave wider powers to the Minister of Fisheries to make regulations regarding a fishing dispute.

Thus fishery laws have been steadily expanded and tightened to stop all types of abuses of both the fishery resources of the Island and the interests of various fishing groups.

Fishery Disputes. Whenever more than one group of fishermen operate in the same area, using different types of gear or coming to the fishing grounds from different areas of residence, one group sooner or later accuses the other of encroachment or damage to resources. Inquiries are held and settlements reached by mutual agreement but the dispute always flares up at a later date with one side accusing the other of not keeping to the agreed terms. Disputes have been a prolific source of rules and regulations formed under various Ordinances in the past and continue to generate new regulations as well as amendments and extensions to the present Ordinance. The settlement or proposed regulations sometimes have a scientific basis such as the need to conserve stocks but in addition the arbitrator has to provide both sides with reasonable facilities to earn their living.

Anti-dynamiting. In contrast to the regulations arising out of disputes, laws to prevent the dynamiting or poisoning of fish have been passed as an urgent scientific necessity to conserve fishing stocks. Dynamiting or poisoning fish is an extremely wasteful method of fishing as it destroys young

fish and eggs and also kills large numbers of mature fish which are not collected as they are scattered or sink to the bottom of the sea. Inland waters have also been subjected to this type of wanton destruction.

To combat this menace the Fisheries Department seeks the assistance of Police Stations and Village Headmen in suspected areas which are mostly on the thinly populated east coast. The laws on the subject have been made increasingly punitive and simple tests have been devised for the detection of dynamited fish. In 1949, a Preventive Force was organized as a mobile unit consisting of a preventive officer, 2 sergeants and 9 guards.

Besides the arrest and prosecution of offenders, steps were taken to create a strong public opinion against the use of dynamite and poisons for the capture of fish. Numerous Rural Development Societies have been addressed on the evils of these practices, stressing the destruction of immature fish, eggs and the minute organisms which serve as food for fish. Through leaflets, wide publicity has been given to the provisions of the law relating to these offences. In the Trincomalee area, which has the largest number of offenders, a volunteer Fishermen's Association helps the Police and the Fisheries Department to arrest dynamiters. In 1951, a speed boat was obtained for checking of dynamiting offences at sea and is on patrol duty on the east coast. Other departmental boats and launches are also used for patrol work. Rewards in order to assist in the attempts to check dynamiters are met with from the Fisheries Reward Fund and from the vote for preventive work. In 1956, the Preventive Force was strengthened by the addition of 10 officers making it possible for anti-dynamiting work to be done over a wider area, but the Force is not yet strong enough to control dynamiting of fish throughout the Island. Preventive action has to be maintained and the Fisheries Department continues to receive assistance from other Government departments and public spirited citizens and organized societies in its campaign against dynamiters.

Registration and Licences. In 1949, the registration of boats and fishing nets was advocated in order to make it easier for the Government to prohibit the use of unseaworthy boats, trace thefts of boats and gear, and by identifying the boats and their owner to make it possible to maintain statistical records, keep track of migrating fishermen and use craft as security for loans. The boats could be marked with registration numbers which would also serve to indicate the area from which they sail. Regulations on these lines were passed in 1953 and became operative on January 1, 1954. These regulations provided for registration of boats as well as annual renewal of registration both of which carried fees payable by the fishermen. The renewal fees were reduced in 1955 by an amendment. About 16,500 boats have so far been registered but only about half of them have had this registration renewed at the end of 1957. It is difficult to compel an owner to register his boat or renew his registration. The mere possession of an unregistered boat is not an offence and prosecutions can be launched only if the unregistered boat is used for fishing.

The registration of beach seine nets is done through the Government Agents of the various provinces. Other types of gear or equipment are not registered.

Licences are required to fish in some inland waters but are not necessary for sea fishing. Permits must be obtained to build traps of any kind in fresh, brackish or marine waters. The beche-de-mer (holothurian) fishery was restricted to Co-operative Societies only up to 1957, while comprehensive regulations govern chank fishing and window-pane oyster fishing. Pearl fisheries is exclusively done by or on behalf of the Government.

6. STATISTICS

Fishery statistics of a limited kind including the weight of fish transported by rail from the various fishing centres of the Island were collected over a number of years by the Director of the Colombo Museum in his capacity as Marine Biologist. He had neither the facilities nor sources of information to assess even roughly the amount of fish landed round the Island and as a measure of retrenchment the collection of the few statistics available was discontinued in 1932. Statistics relating to imports and exports of fish and fish products continued to be collected and published annually in the Ceylon Customs Returns.