

THE DAILY NEWS

PRINCE RUPERT - BRITISH COLUMBIA

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DAILY EDITION

Wednesday, Aug. 16, 1922.

Close Season for Halibut and Other Matters Before Commission Final Session

After an all day session, the Fisheries Commission, which has been sitting in the city for two days, adjourned last night at 10:30 and will meet again at the Naas River this afternoon, the commissioners and officials having left for the North on the steamer Estevan this morning. Many witnesses were heard yesterday afternoon and evening, and almost every branch of the fishing industry was touched upon in the course of the taking of the evidence. The witnesses since yesterday noon were T. H. Johnson, J. H. Meagher, John Dybhavn, W. E. Williams, William Wilson, William Sims, C. G. Perry, Henry Collison, Rev. Peter Kelly, of Nanaimo, Andrew Reed, and James Catt, of Lakelse.

T. H. Johnson, manager of the Canadian Fish and Cold Storage Co., was the first witness to appear before the commission giving evidence from a strictly company standpoint.

Mr. Johnson said he would favor a close season for halibut. He has seen, in his lifetime, the halibut fisheries depleted in Europe and on the Atlantic seaboard and during the past 15 years had seen a great depletion on this coast. He thought that the fisheries should be discontinued altogether in certain sections. For three months after November 4 would seem to him the proper period for the close season. Of course arrangements would have to be made with the United States before a close season could be put into practice. The witness described his own plant and its capacity and also dealt with the markets and the methods of handling fish through the Exchange here.

Jap Fishermen.

Speaking of the Prince Rupert cannery he said that the plant this season had 23 salmon boats operated by white men, 27 by Japs and 25 by Indians. The Japs produced more fish than the white men or the Indians, from the company standpoint, they were the most effective fishermen.

Mr. Johnson said that as far as his company was concerned, he was not in favor of gas boats being used in salmon fisheries on the Skeena River at the present time. His reason was one of economy. His company had now about 75 sailboats which cost \$20,000. If gas boats were permitted, competition would compel everybody to use them exclusively. The company's present boats were not suitable for

gasoline engines and would have to be replaced.

Mr. Martell referred to evidence given by Mr. Johnson at the Sanford-Evans investigation in 1917. Mr. Johnson had then said he favored gas boats on the Skeena River. Why had he since changed his mind?

Company View Point.

Mr. Johnson admitted that his present viewpoint was that of his company and went on to explain that the 75 or so sail boats now used by the company would have to be replaced with 10 or so gasboats at a cost of possibly \$2,000 each. At the same time the departmental regulations would not allow for the taking of more fish so they would have to lay out an investment of \$80,000 instead of \$20,000 and the result would be the same.

Mr. Duff thought that the advantage from gas boats would be for the fishermen and not for the canneries. Mr. Johnson presented a document as evidence to show that the fishermen were not in favor of gas boats. This document, which was not read, had been prepared by the B. C. Cannery Association.

Cross Firing.

There was some cross firing between Mr. Neill and Mr. Johnson in regard to the gas boat question, the former taking the fishermen's standpoint in favor of gasboats and the latter viewing the question strictly from his company's angle.

In answer to a question by Mr. McQuarrie, Mr. Johnson said that he believed there had been a depletion of the salmon fisheries in the past ten years and the logical conclusion would be that there had been too many fish

caught. He would not blame the Japs particularly for that, for every man, white, Indian or Jap would be sharing in the general responsibility for the depletion. He was not a scientist and could not offer any suggestion as to restoration.

"Apparently Mr. Johnson wants to keep the Japs in business," said Mr. McQuarrie. Could you not get along without the Japs?"

Mr. Johnson—"We tried it in 1913 and 1914 and couldn't get along without them. They didn't bring in enough fish."

Cannery History.

This led up to a general discussion of the original establishment of the Prince Rupert cannery which had been given its first charter from the department on the understanding that it would be a white man's cannery. Mr. Johnson said that they had appealed to the department to allow the use of the Japs and it had been granted. Mr. Martell observed that the company had "put it over" the department when the change had been allowed.

After some bandying of words between Mr. McQuarrie and Mr. Johnson, the latter stated that he would be in favor of gradual reduction in the number of Japanese fishermen but he would not be prepared to state the exact percentage yearly. In reply to Mr. Martell's question, Mr. Johnson said that it was unfair to ask him if he was prepared to eliminate the Japs entirely again.

Question of Embargo.

Mr. Johnson said he did not believe in the embargo on export of raw chums and pinks. Part of the salmon bought here came from Alaska and the United States could retaliate by cutting off that supply. The greater the freedom in these matters, the better it would be for the industry.

Referring to the propagation of salmon, Mr. Johnson said that the natural increase should take the place of the fish caught but it apparently did not.

In answer to a question by Major Motherwell, Mr. Johnson said that he thought the use of power boats would put the salmon fishing even more in the hands of the Japs. "Of course," said Mr. Martell, "he is assuming that gasoline boat licenses would be granted to the Japs."

Inspector Unnecessary.

Witness said he did not think an inspector between the fishermen and the buyers was necessary. He had no objection to it but failed to see what good it would do. The article purchased would continue to be judged by the company and not by the government inspector. It was a matter of private bargaining and disputes were not serious.

Mr. Johnson thought that a tariff on American fish passing through this port would drive the halibut away.

J. H. Meagher.

J. H. Meagher, secretary of the Deep Sea Fishermen's Union explained the workings of the organization which he represented and gave some very useful and instructive information with regard to the habits of the halibut in discussing the proposal for a close season. Witness stated that the Union now had a membership of about 1000, all of whom were white fishermen, Canadians and Americans. The headquarters of the Union was in Seattle with branches at Prince Rupert and Ketchikan. He himself had been a fisherman for some thirty years, eight years on this coast and 21 on the Atlantic.

He supported the idea of having an inspector for this port to look over the culling of halibut. A man should be selected who understood the business so that he could settle arguments arising between the fishermen and the buyers. Fish was usually graded according to weight. First class fish was that between 16 and 80 pounds, the second being under and over these figures respectively. Cull fish was that under 6 pounds. The Union rules called for the fishermen to see that all cull fish was dumped or destroyed and fines could be imposed on members who did not see that this was done or if it was reported sold. He was sorry to say that cases had been reported where such fish had been sold as third class.

Weighing of Fish.

Besides culling the fish, the purchasing companies also weighed it. There should also be an inspector of weights and

measures. On suggestion of Mr. Dickie, Mr. Meagher said this office might be combined with the other.

Questioned by Mr. Cowie, Mr. Meagher stated that the average of a recent trip of 15,000 pounds had been 1000 pounds fillets or culls and from 7000 to 8000 pounds under ten pounds.

In certain grounds, such as Heate Straits and Goose Island grounds, there was a large proportion of small fish. These small fish never reproduced.

Mr. Cowie—"Do you not think that the catching of such a large proportion of fish which never reproduce is a tremendous drain on the fisheries?"

Mr. Meagher—"Yes."

Mr. Cowie—"Could not these grounds of small fish be located and the fishing in them cut off?"

Mr. Meagher—"Yes, Coronation Gulf is another instance. Such fish are of little commercial value and are indeed a great drain on the fisheries."

Spawning of Halibut.

Questioned by Mr. Martell, Mr. Meagher gave his observations regarding the spawning of halibut with relation to a close season. In 1909, when he had come to the coast, they had located a spawning ground at Sydney Inlet, on the West Coast of Vancouver Island. The fish commenced to gather at this spot about October 1 and continued to gather until Nov. 1. The fish that were to spawn grew larger until about the middle of January when they had all spawned. This place had been pretty well fished out. Next, a similar ground had been found at North Island and this too had been pretty well fished out. Next were the Yakutat banks from which a good number of fish were still brought in. In 1915 another big ground had been located at Yakutat, north of Yakutat. There were fish in abundance there.

Mr. Meagher stated his opinion that some fish spawned in November and December but not in October. In 1916 a run of fish that had previously been spawning in a certain ground was located in 220 fathoms. Some 115,000 pounds were taken and it was found that the sacs were still in the fish but there was no spawn. These fish had evidently already spawned and left the water of 90 to 130 fathoms where they had previously been. Next trip there were no fish there at all so that was as far as they could follow them.

Valuable Information.

Questioned by Mr. Martell, Mr. Meagher stated that he thought government biologists could get valuable information by visiting these banks and following the fish up. At the same time a scout boat could search for new grounds and could do some charting. A new halibut bank had been reported recently some 250 miles west of Cape Flattery. Mr. Meagher stated that his organization had favored from November 15 to February 15 as a close season. Both Canadian and American fishermen had agreed to that.

Answering questions by Mr. Cowie, witness stated that at present mostly all the large

American schooners landed their catches here at different times as well as the smaller boats. This was the most convenient port but they would, of course, go to Ketchikan if a better market offered.

Ruin the Industry.

Speaking of the 2c a pound tax proposed to be charged by the American authorities on fish landed at this port, Mr. Meagher gave it as the opinion of the Union that it would ruin the fishing industry on the North Pacific Coast. A petition against it had been circulated among the fishermen and none had refused to sign it. This petition had been forwarded to Washington. He did not think the 2c charge would divert the fisheries to Ketchikan. The ferry proposal between Ketchikan and Prince Rupert would be impracticable on account of the rough waters that would be encountered in crossing Chatham Sound. It might be all right for steamers. Ketchikan was not as convenient or direct as Prince Rupert. The move for the 2c charge on fish landed here had been promoted by Ketchikan business men.

Mr. Meagher endorsed the idea that there should be a patrol and life saving boat for the halibut fishing grounds and referred to the incident of the Nottad last year where four men had perished, their boat being found some three or four weeks later turned upside down on the Alaska coast.

John Dybhavn.

John Dybhavn, manager of the Royal Fish Co., speaking of the desirability of the close season for halibut, said that judging by the fish that came in there was no doubt they spawned in November and December. Having propagation in view he considered November, December and January, the proper time for a close season. He instanced two catches landed that day, one of which had 15,000 pounds of halibut with only 3000 pounds of prime fish large enough to be classed as first class. The 12,000 pounds was under ten pounds and sold either as chickens or were culled. There had been several catches taken off Massett of this kind. It was disastrous to catch that kind of fish and fishing should be prohibited on those banks. He understood that the fishermen threw out a good many small fish when they were taken off the hooks.

Mr. Cowie—"Do you think it would be possible to have a close (Continued on Page Five)"

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