

WAF/C.



CANADA

ADDRESS REPLY TO
DEPUTY MINISTER
AND QUOTE

DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVAL SERVICE

N^o 726 - 3 - 2.

Ottawa, Oct. 29, 1914.

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Sir,-

In accordance with your personal instructions I visited, Charlotte County, N.B., and on the 20th inst.

conducted an investigation under oath at St. George, into the representations that were submitted to you, that the sardine fishery of L'Etang river has for a number of years past been falling off, owing to pollution of the water from a sardine cannery or canneries near the mouth of the river, and to seining.

To enable me to make the investigation under oath, an Order-in-Council, of which I attach a copy, was approved on the 6th inst., appointing ^{me} a commissioner under Chapter 104, Revised Statutes of Canada, to inquire into the matter.

On August 5th ultimo, Mr. J. Artmans Watt, wrote to the Minister stating in effect that for nine years past he had been trying to get some one interested in the conditions obtaining in L'Etang river; that it is the home of sardine herring, but herring feed at the surface and the surface therefore must be kept clean or the herring will

The Honourable,

leave; but on.....

The Minister of Naval Service,

OTTAWA.

*File
with
F.W. J. F.*

120

but on account of refuse from canning plants, the river has not been clean, and for the past nine years the fishery has been steadily failing, as more refuse had been going into the river each year; as an evidence of this, ^{he stated} last year in July the cannery of Messrs. Connors Bros. was closed for repairs, and during the time it was so closed, the fish came in and remained but went out when canning began; that the fish still come into the river and go up about three miles when they strike oily water, then they turn and run out. He also stated that seining was allowed to go on.

The substance of Mr. Hatt's letter was communicated to the Inspector for the District, who reported that the only cannery now operating in the vicinity of L' Etang river, is Connors Bros' at Blacks Harbour, and that no oil or refuse is allowed to escape therefrom into the river. The refuse is converted into fertilizer and the oil is all saved. Also with regard to seining, that as soon as information that such was being carried on was received, attention was given it, and it was stopped, ~~and~~ Mr. Hatt was so advised.

Following this, a petition from Mr. Hatt and others was forwarded to the Minister by Capt. Chas. Johnson, of St. George, stating that the fishery in the river has been steadily failing for the past nine or ten years, owing to pollution of the water by refuse and floating grease, mainly from Messrs. Connors Bros. cannery, and praying for an investigation into the matter by some one from outside the County who is familiar with the business and who has honesty enough to report fairly the conditions as they are. Mr. Johnson also complained of seining and suggested that the investigation be under oath. Hence the investigation.

As it was considered that the petitioners and others interested in the river fishery, would willingly attend the

The investigation, it was not regarded necessary to issue subpoenas. The petitioners and other fishermen were advised through Mr. Johnson, and the cannery owners by letter ^{and personally}, that the investigation would be held at Coots' Hall, St. George, on Tuesday the 21st inst., 2 p.m. ~~There was a considerable number present.~~ Mr. Hatt was the first witness called. His evidence is attached. After he had been examined, I asked if there were any others of the petitioners or other fishermen present whose evidence would be of value. Mr. Hatt intimated that there did not seem to be; but he appeared satisfied that his evidence covered the ground.

appended

Mr. N.M. Connors of Connors Bros. was then called. His evidence is also attached. Capt. Chas. Johnson, ^{in the name of} Johnson and Tait, was then examined. His evidence is also appended.

As it developed that the cannery of Mr. Sutton Clark, the only other on or near the river, had not been opened since it was closed last year, and as there was considerable conflict in the evidence as to whether oil or refuse is escaping from Messrs. Connors cannery, and as the object of the investigation was rather to determine if the water is now being polluted, and if so, to ascertain what would require to be done to stop it, rather than the condition in years gone by, I saw little to be gained by taking further evidence, and that the end in view could best be achieved by visiting the plant. I consequently decided to do so next day, and requested Mr. Hatt and Mr. Johnson to accompany me, which they did.

L'Etang River is ^{about} 7 miles long, - a tracing of it is attached. Weirs are built about its mouth and almost up its entire length. Blacks Harbour or Bay, - about one mile deep, - branches off at the mouth of the river. Messrs. Connors Bros. cannery is nearly at the upper end of the Harbour.

Weirs extend.....

extend all along one shore of the Harbour. These are owned principally or altogether by Messrs. Connors Bros.

Mr. Hatt's evidence is not convincing and important instances he cited to prove his contentions, were evidently based on hearsay and were found to be incorrect as is evidenced by his statement that the cannery had ^{last year} been closed some time for repairs, whereas it transpires that the cannery was not closed at all throughout the season, ~~last~~ year. He also stated that the decline in the river fishery had been gradual for the past seven or eight years, and that such was due to pollution of the water from Messrs. Connors Bros. cannery. He stated further that the weirs in Blacks Harbour had not been seined for seven or eight years. Mr. Connors swore they were seined three years ago when considerable quantities of fish were taken.

Mr. Hatt testified that he had not been at the cannery this season at all. He testified further that when Mr. Clark's cannery, which is located in Limekiln Cove at not more than about one quarter of a mile from the main River, was running, there was no more pollution of the water than now, notwithstanding that previous to last year, he made little effort to prevent pollution of the water.

Surely the pollution from two canneries, - unless the pack of the one now is greater than that of the two when both were operating, which I do not understand to be the case, - would be worse than from one.

So far as seining is concerned he swore that there had been none for ten years until last year, so that it could not be a serious factor in the decline. Moreover he is an advocate of allowing seining up to within 500 feet of a weir, though weirs are not permitted nearer each other than one thousand feet. While Mr. Johnson signed the petition, he swore that he had no knowledge of the cause of the decline in the fishery.

On visiting the.....

On visiting the cannery, it was found to be thoroughly clean, and to be operated in a very careful manner. In years gone by there was no doubt some oil escaping from the baths in which the cans are boiled, but the quantity was evidently not great. Recently, - I was advised this year, a filter has been devised that separates the oil and dirt from the water. One of these has already been installed at the outlet from the baths. It seems to work perfectly. The water that comes from it is quite clear.

At present the drainage from the presses goes into a puncheon, where it is allowed to remain until the oil comes to the surface. It is then ~~skipped~~^{skinned} off, and the water remaining is allowed to escape into the ~~water~~^{Harbour}. This is the only possible source of pollution, and the amount of oil in this water is so infinitesimal when regard is had for the area into which it is falling, that I find it impossible to believe that it can have any effect on the weir fishery of L'Etang river, a mile distant. In any event a filter has already been ordered to replace the puncheon. Its arrival is daily expected. When it is installed, all possible danger of escaping oil will be obviated.

While Mr. Johnson was satisfied that nothing more was needed, Mr. Hatt was not. He was insistent that the press-house should be removed from the wharf altogether. He could only urge as a reason that he could not be sure that the filter would work properly or that it would be kept in operation.

This seems an idle fear, as apart from the fact that for the sake of their own weirs in the Harbour in the immediate vicinity of the cannery, the owners would desire to prevent pollution of the water, the oil is worth money, and they would therefore not desire to allow any of it to escape.

Mr. Hatt also urged very strongly that the harbour bed under and about the cannery had become so polluted.....

polluted that it is a serious source of trouble. This was examined at low water. While there is some grease about, in my judgment it is very small indeed keeping in view that the cannery has been in operation about twenty years, and even if the cannery were closed, the existing conditions in that respect would not be changed.

As this Department is now administering that portion of the Meat and Canned Foods Act which relates to the canning of fish, the local Fishery Officer, Mr. Justason, visits the cannery weekly and always reports it to be in proper condition. There is nothing to show that both the Inspector and the Local Officer have not promptly and effectively dealt with seining when it was tried.

In the light of the above, I do not recommend any changes in the cannery or its operation, after the second filter has been installed.

Moreover, I beg to submit that it has not been shown that pollution or oil in the water has had anything to do with sardines not coming to the river in the quantities they did years ago. Even granted that in past years there was oil escaping, it would go out on the ebb tide, and much if not all of it, would go into the Bay of Fundy and the amount that would go up the river with the incoming tide would be so small that I find it difficult to believe that it would have any effect on incoming herring.

The fact is the herring fishery is erratic, and there are other places besides the L'Etang where it is not what it used to be. I cannot but fear that the evidence is becoming more and more conclusive that the run of sardine herring is diminishing, or at least that they are not coming inshore to their one-time favourite haunts in such large numbers.

I have the honour to be Sir,

Your obedient servant,

Walter J. ...
 Superintendent of Fisheries.