

§ 5. The Commonwealth Department of Fisheries.

1. **The Federal Council of Australasia.**—The Federal Council had power to legislate with regard to fisheries in Australasian waters beyond territorial limits. In its second session (opened 16th January, 1888) an Act was passed to regulate pearl-shell and bêche-de-mer fisheries in Australasian waters adjacent to Queensland; and in the third session, opened shortly afterwards, the Act was made applicable to Western Australia. Upon the passing of the Commonwealth Constitution Act of 1900, however, the Federal Council ceased to exist.

2. **Commonwealth Investigations.**—In 1907 the Commonwealth Government decided to demonstrate what might be attained commercially by the application of modern methods. A Federal Investigation Ship, the *Endeavour*, was constructed specially for the work, and a Director of Fisheries was appointed. Experimental cruises were immediately undertaken. These shewed that the Commonwealth possesses an asset of considerable value in her sea fisheries. The scope and results of the inquiries are set out in the reports issued by the late Director.

3. **Scope of the Inquiry.**—The immediate scope laid down for the investigation was shortly, as follows:—

- (i) By various means of capture to ascertain what marketable food-fishes may be found in ocean waters adjacent to Australia.
- (ii) In what quantity they may be taken.
- (iii) To what extent they migrate, and whither.
- (iv) How they may be conveniently and economically captured.
- (v) By systematic survey to find out and chart suitable fishing grounds.

In addition to the work which was thus carried on in the various recognised methods of capture (including long-line and drift-net fishing, etc.), hydrographic survey work, etc., was carried out for the purpose of ascertaining the nature of the sea bottom, depth of water, currents, and sea temperature.

4. **The F.I.S. "Endeavour."**—The construction of the investigation vessel was undertaken in the Commonwealth, and was upon the lines shewn by the most recent European experience to be of greatest advantage, with necessary modifications to suit the Australian climate. A description of the vessel, which was the first Commonwealth-owned seagoing ship, is given in Official Year Book No. 6, p. 473. Up to the end of 1913, 85 cruises had been made in eastern and southern waters. In 1914, 13 more cruises were successfully undertaken; but the vessel with all on board, including the Director, was lost on her 99th cruise, which was commenced on 20th November, 1914.

5. **Trawling Grounds Discovered by the "Endeavour."**—According to information supplied by the Commonwealth Department of Trade and Customs, it would appear from the experiments carried out by the *Endeavour* on the shelf of the east coast of Australia, that the best trawling grounds extend from near Port Stephens, in New South Wales, past Sydney to Gabo Island, continuing across the eastern slope of Bass Strait past Flinders Island to Tasmania. These trawling grounds cover an area of approximately 6,000 square miles, and are within easy access to two markets—Sydney and Melbourne. Extensive operations have been carried out on these grounds, and fish in payable quantities have been obtained.

A very rich trawling ground has also been located in the centre of the Great Australian Bight, estimated to cover an area of about 4,000 square miles. The depth varies from 80 to 300 fathoms, but the greater portion of the trawlable area is situated between 100 and 200 fathoms. Excellent results were obtained by the *Endeavour* in this locality, fine rock ling and flathead being among the many choice varieties caught. This ground is situated about half-way between Adelaide and Albany, and about two days' steaming from either place.

In both of the trawling areas referred to above, considerable quantities of prime edible fish have been caught by the *Endeavour*, thus demonstrating the potential value of Australia's deep-sea fisheries.

6. **The Continental Shelf.**—In addition to the primary duty of locating payable trawling grounds, extensive hydrographic surveys were carried out by the *Endeavour* along the coast from the north of Queensland to the west coast of Western Australia. Soundings, samples of the sea bottom, sea temperatures, etc., were taken, principally

within the hundred-fathom line, in order to determine the suitability or otherwise of the localities for trawling. These observations were, in most instances, taken prior to the casting of the trawl net, which was the principal means of capture used by the *Endeavour* for ascertaining the richness of areas so far as the abundance of fish food was concerned. Most of the soundings have been charted and are available for public information.

The late Mr. H. C. Dannevig, formerly Director of Fisheries for the Commonwealth, in his "Report on the Continental Shelf on the East Coast of Australia" (Fisheries—Volume III., Part 6), explained how systematic surveys were carried out by him on the *Endeavour* and information obtained as to the nature of the continental shelf which surrounds the Australian continent.

The shelf consists of a narrow submerged ledge, varying in width from 10 miles to more than 100 miles, covered by a depth of less than 100 fathoms. From the outer edge of this ledge or shelf the bottom slopes away more or less abruptly towards the great ocean depths. It is within the area of the shelf that trawling grounds may be looked for.

On the east coast of Australia, the typical shelf commences at Sandy Cape in Queensland, and continues southwards. For about 360 miles, or south of Smoky Cape in latitude 31° S., the shelf presents peculiarities which gradually disappear further south. One of these peculiarities is that the shallow portion of the shelf continues seawards for a considerable distance, so that, for instance, at Double Island, the depth is only 50 fathoms. At this depth the shelf may here be said to terminate, as, at depths from 60 to 100 fathoms, apart from being narrow and rocky, the sea floor is frequently so steep as to form part of the general slope downwards to abyssal depths. Another peculiarity is that northwards from Cape Moreton the shallow portion of the ledge is mainly covered with coral sand, which southwards gives way to a somewhat yellow sand, occasionally interspersed, in localities where the currents are strong, with gravelly beds.

Southwards from Smoky Cape the relative proportion between the inner and outer areas becomes reversed. At the Cape itself the shelf is narrow and divides into two equal belts; the shallow area of less than 50 fathoms, and a deeper stratum with an average depth of 70 fathoms. From here southwards the outer stratum becomes gradually wider at the expense of the inshore or secondary ledge, a maximum width of which is found in the Newcastle Bight, where the inshore ledge is seven to eight miles wide, while the outer ledge extends for another twenty-one miles before breaking off into the deep. Simultaneously with the appearance of the outside ledge at Smoky Cape the depth of the "break off" increases quickly to about 100 fathoms, and remains so for the remainder of the coast south to Gabo Island.

Southwards from Gabo Island the shelf widens out considerably, and consists entirely of the outward or deeper stratum, which, between 50 and 300 fathoms, is many miles wide. The edge gradually bends westward parallel with the coast until opposite the mouth of the Snowy River, where at a distance of about thirty miles from land it turns abruptly to the south. On approaching the bend, the shallow area (of less than 50 fathoms) has gradually extended at the expense of the outer ledge, and while the former continues westward through Bass Strait and connects Victoria and Tasmania, the latter extends as a relatively narrow belt along the eastern slope past Flinders Island and along the east coast of Tasmania.

The hundred-fathom line from the south of Tasmania to the western end of the Great Australian Bight was also surveyed by the *Endeavour*. On that portion of the coast it was found that the continental shelf was considerably wider than on the east coast, and the slope of the shelf more gradual.

7. Publications of the Commonwealth Fisheries Department.—New and rare species of fish and marine forms secured by the *Endeavour* have been preserved, examined and described by various scientists, recognised as authorities on the subject of marine life. The following monographs have been published by the Department of Trade and Customs, the names of the authors being appended:—

Subject.	Author.
<i>Mollusca</i> (2 parts)	Charles Hedley, F.L.S. (Assistant Curator and Conchologist, Australian Museum, Sydney).
<i>Fishes</i> (4 parts)	Allan R. McCulloch (Zoologist, Australian Museum).

Subject.	Author.
<i>Sponges</i>	E. F. Hallmann, B.Sc. (Australian Museum).
<i>Assymetron</i> .. .	Miss Janet W. Raff, B.Sc. (Melbourne University).
<i>Globigerina Ooze</i> ..	F. Chapman, B.A., A.L.S. (Palæontologist, National Museum, Melbourne).
<i>Hydroida</i> (3 parts) ..	W. M. Bale, F.R.M.S.
<i>Foraminifera and Ostroæda</i> ..	F. Chapman, B.A., A.L.S.
<i>Algæ</i>	A. H. Lucas, M.A. (Sydney Grammar School).
<i>Polychæta</i> (2 parts) ..	William Benham, M.A., D.Sc., F.R.S. (Professor of Biology at the University of Otago, N.Z.).
<i>Gephyrean Priapulus</i>	Do. do. do.
<i>Sea Lilies, Star Fishes, Brittle Stars and Sea Urchins</i>	Hubert Lyman Clark (Curator of Echinoderms, Museum of Comparative Zoology, Cambridge, Mass., U.S.A.).
<i>Cephalopoda</i>	S. Stillman Berry.
<i>Spider Crabs</i>	Miss Mary J. Rathbun (United States National Museum, Washington, D.C.).

The following papers were, in addition, prepared by the Director of Fisheries, the late Mr. H. C. Dannevig :—

First and Second Preliminary Reports on the Fishing Experiments carried out by the F.I.S. *Endeavour*.

Notes on Australia's Fisheries, with a summary of the results obtained by the F.I.S. *Endeavour*.

Paper on the Continental Shelf of the East Coast of Australia.

Paper on the Physiography of Bass Strait.

§ 6. The State Trawling Industry—New South Wales.

As far back as the year 1898, the New South Wales Government equipped a small vessel called *Thetis* for the purpose of investigating the potentialities of the State coastal waters in regard to the supply of edible fish. The knowledge gained from the cruises of this vessel was, of course, considerably augmented by that obtained since 1907 by the more modern methods adopted by the Commonwealth vessel *Endeavour*. In view of the favourable outlook, the State Government determined to exploit the fishing industry. The necessary vessels and equipment were ordered, and by the middle of the year 1915, three steam trawlers built of steel and equipped in accordance with the most up-to-date methods had commenced operations in the coastal waters. Other vessels have also been built for trawling and surface fishing. It was not long before these vessels had proved the existence of highly valuable trawling grounds within a day's steam of Sydney Heads, and what is believed to be one of the most prolific areas in the world has been located within three hours' steam of the home wharf. The ample product has been landed and sold to the public at extremely low rates in the State retail depots, of which several have been established, as well as at occasional sales in markets and in country districts.

Moreover, in connexion with the undertaking, arrangements have been made for the collection and distribution of fish taken by coastal and estuarine fishermen. With this end in view, large refrigerating stations have been built at Newcastle, Clarence River, and Port Stephens. The scheme has proved a great boon to fishermen by obviating the losses caused by the uncertain supply of ice and the absence of facilities for marketing.

§ 7. Fish Preserving.

Bounties were provided for ten years by the Federal Government for fish preserving, the rate payable being $\frac{1}{4}$ d. per lb. The amounts paid were £27 in 1907-8; £1,727 in 1908-9; £311 in 1909-10; £115 in 1910-11; £168 in 1911-12; £103 in 1912-13; £80 in 1913-14; £156 in 1914-15; £106 in 1915-16; £177 in 1916-17. In 1917-18, £35 was paid in satisfaction of a claim made in the preceding year. Up to the present but little development has taken place, the establishments which claimed bounty for fish preserving numbering only one in 1917-18, as compared with five in 1916-17, two in 1915-16, and five in 1914-15. No bounties were paid in the years 1918-19 and 1919-20.