

SAYS FISH WAS FIXED TOO LOW

**C. M. Bowman of West Bruce
Scores Government Depart-
ment in Legislature**

MR. MACDIARMID'S BILL

**Member From Bruce Claims Fisher-
men Lose Money on Last Sea-
son's Prices.**

Declaring that the Government fixed the price to be paid by the department for fish without proper investigation and that it is insufficient, and that unless this is corrected this season the Government will defeat its object, and that production will decrease instead of increase in 1919, Mr. Charles M. Bowman of West Bruce in the Legislature yesterday urged the Government to put the department on a sound business basis.

Mr. Bowman quoted figures of the cost of production as furnished to him by fishermen at Southampton, and showed that while the Government was going to pay only eight cents a pound for whitefish and trout, boxed and iced, fishermen last season had sold the same variety of fish at ten cents a pound over the rail of their vessels. He asked if it was right that one class of producer in this Province, the fishermen, should be singled out to give twenty per cent. of their catch on an arbitrary price, especially in view of the fact that they pay a large license fee.

Beginning of Government Fish.

The debate arose when Hon. Finlay Macdiarmid, Minister of Public Works, moved the second reading of his bill respecting the distribution and sale of fish from the waters of Ontario. The Minister said the bill, framed in the broadest possible terms, gave the Government power to meet the situation at present existing in the Province. The action of the Government in entering the fish business was the result of protests from all sections of the Province and the Food Controller. The States of Michigan and Minnesota also took the matter up in a similar way as has been done in Ontario. Up to January 31 last the Government secured from Lake Nipigon 162,000 pounds of fish. He took the Fisherman's Journal to task for a statement that the Government fish really cost between 50 and 60 cents a pound. To date about \$10,000 has been paid the fishermen for their fish, an average of \$5.70 per hundred pounds. A railroad siding and a dock had cost another \$10,000, but this will answer all purposes for several years to come. Including the capital expenditure, which no one would expect to be done, the cost of the fish would only be twelve cents a pound. However, to take care of the demand for fish in the eastern and western portions of the Province, the department has placed a clause in the licenses of fishermen making it possible to secure twenty per cent. of their catch. The Government is now endeavoring to secure information as to the cost of production. If the investigation proves that the price of six and eight cents a pound now offered by the Government is too low, it will be increased to whatever is fair.

Fishermen Co-operate.

The fishermen, said Mr. Macdiarmid, have shown a disposition to co-operate with the department. Between 200 and 300 more licenses have been taken out. During the period in which the Government has been selling fish some 500,000 pounds have been delivered to 64 municipi-

palities. Fish were sold in Toronto at 12½ cents a pound, and the highest price outside, because of transportation charges, was 14 cents. He declared that the enterprise must be self-sustaining.

Mr. Bowman commended the Government for its campaign to increase the consumption of fish, and he explained that his remarks were not by way of criticism, but that the Government might have the facts from fishermen, so as to correct any mistakes that may have been made. Sixty per cent. of the fish brought to Southampton by fishermen last year were sold direct to the dealers, and not to the Dominion Fish Company. The largest fisherman at Southampton allowed depreciation of only \$37.50 on the cost of operation. He sold his trout at 9 cents a pound, his whitefish at 12 cents, and he had a loss at the close of \$1,000. Then, too, the supplies have gone away up in price. Deducting the cost of icing and boxing, the Government, said the speaker, are asking Southampton fishermen to accept 7¼ to 7½ cents a pound for fish which cost them 10 cents, without boxes, last year.

Lack of Business Sense.

"What I fear is that the men in the department who have been responsible for fixing the price at six and eight cents have shown an absolute lack of appreciation of sound business principles, and a proper appreciation and consideration of the fisherman, in handling this proposition," said Mr. Bowman. So far as the fishermen on the Great Lakes are concerned, he said, the margin of profit is very small. While the fishermen may be compelled to sign these licenses this year, they may be driven out of business next year, and we will have less fish from the Great Lakes in 1919 than in the past. Instead of fixing the price, he thought it might be better to compel the fishermen to take care of their Canadian customers first, and also to take proper methods to eliminate excessive profits. Thus the same objects might be obtained without the Province having to take any business hazards.

In conclusion, Mr. Bowman emphasized the danger of handling the matter in such a way as to defeat the objects the Government had in view.

Advisory Board Suggested.

Sir William Hearst, resuming the debate in the evening, announced that the Government was considering the advisability of appointing an advisory board, on which the fishermen, the dealers and the Government would be represented. The desire of the Government was to give the best quality of fish to the people at the best possible price. There is a difference between taking a certain portion of the fishermen's catch and a portion of the produce from the farmer. The fish are one of the natural assets of the Province and they belong to the people. He declared the Government would not be a party to not giving the fishermen of the Province a fair deal. The Government intends to pay an equitable price, and it will be raised if an investigation shows that that is necessary.

Mr. Proudfoot, the Opposition Leader, asked Hon. Mr. Macdiarmid if it were true the department still had 35 tons of fish on hand which was purchased last fall.

Mr. Macdiarmid said that 70 tons were purchased from the Lake Erie fishermen last fall at six cents a pound, and between 25 and 30 tons are still on hand. This will all be sold in two or three weeks.

Amount Purchased.

Replying to further questions of the Opposition Leader, Mr. Macdiarmid said that 451,760 pounds of fish had been purchased from all sources up to March 1. The total amount paid the fishermen was \$26,532, an average of \$5.80 per hundred pounds. From Lake Nipigon 161,739 pounds of fish were taken at an average cost of \$4.95 per hundred pounds. The cost of boxes was 55 cents for every hundred pounds, and the average cost of ice for each box 20 cents. The