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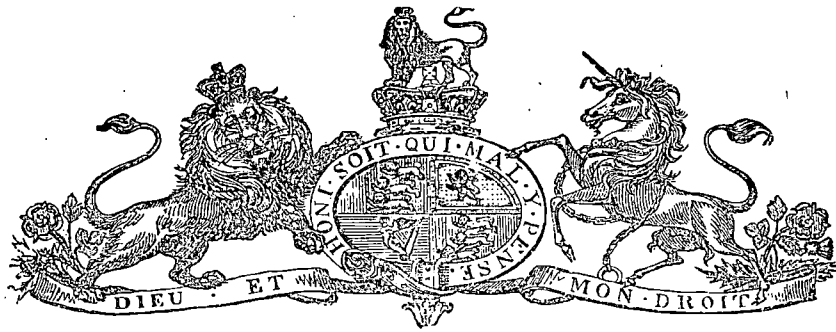
1889.

PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA.

GOVERNMENT OYSTER RESERVES :

REPORT OF COMMITTEE.

Presented to both Houses of Parliament by His Excellency's Command.



Hobart, 24th August, 1889.

SIR,

I HAVE the honor to forward, for your information, copy of a Report by a Committee of the Board upon the Oyster Fisheries and the future management of the Government Oyster Reserves. I may add that the Report was adopted at a special meeting of the Board held yesterday, and that it is intended to take immediate action to give effect to the recommendations.

I have the honor to be,

Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

MATTHEW SEAL, *Chairman Fisheries Board.*

The Hon. the Chief Secretary.

REPORT of Committee appointed "to consider the whole Question of the future Management of the Government Oyster Reserves, and the desirability or otherwise of retaining all the present Beds."

YOUR Committee, having given their most earnest attention to the subject entrusted by the Board to their consideration, and having by personal inspection and careful enquiry, and reports obtained through the aid of the police, made themselves acquainted with the various Government Oyster Reserves, have now the honor to submit for the consideration and decision of the Board the following remarks and the conclusions they have arrived at, and recommendations resulting therefrom:—

There are, as you are aware, Government Reserves at the following places, and a concise description of each bed is now given:—1. Little Oyster Cove. 2. Shipwrights' Point, River Huon. 3. Spring Bay. 4. Little Swanport. 5. Swansea. 6. George's Bay. 7. River Tamar.

1.—*Little Oyster Cove.*

In this locality two Government Reserves exist, which had been stocked with oysters obtained from Barnes' Bay, on the Bruni Island shore, and from Spring Bay. A personal inspection of these beds was made. It is to be regretted that a greater degree of success has not been achieved; the artificial frames and collectors, and the protecting fences have all suffered from the depredations of the teredo worm, and are now in a complete state of decay. Spawning has been very limited, and a large number of the original stock are dead; but it is stated that many of the oysters brought from Spring Bay were dead upon arrival, and were laid down as cultch. The beds exist in close proximity to the jetty used by the Channel steamers, and this traffic and the drainage into the bay may to some extent destroy the natural conditions which might otherwise be favourable to the development of the industry in this locality.

2.—*Shipwrights' Point, River Huon.*

One Government Reserve has been established, which we have not had the opportunity of visiting; but, from the report of the Superintendent of Police of the district, it would appear that although the oysters are healthy, the fall of spat has been extremely limited. The artificial frames used are in a state of decay.

3.—*Spring Bay.*

We have made a personal inspection of this bay, where there are now two Government Reserves. There were formerly four, one of which had been transferred to W. Tapner in settlement of a claim he had against the Government, and the other has been destroyed by floods. One of the existing beds had been prepared as a fattening ground, but we cannot bear testimony to its success in that direction. The oysters are laid upon artificial frames or ambulances, and did not appear to us to be in a progressive condition, and the object sought by the experiment had certainly not been attained. On the other Government Reserve visited there are a number of frames with slates, palings, and strings of oyster shells to act as spat collectors. An inspection of these collectors disclosed a very limited amount of spat, and although we were informed that a large number of adult oysters had been laid down on this bed, we could not

ascertain their location. We visited some of the private beds, which were in a very much more satisfactory condition, and bore evidence of a higher state of cultivation than the Government Reserves. One bed, more particularly, belonging to a company, and which is under the care of W. Tapner, was a marked success, and in this and other private beds cultivated by Tapner the use of the artificial collectors and ambulances had been altogether avoided, the ordinary methods of intercepting spat by means of stones and cultch being adopted with the best results. We tested the ground outside the private beds and were pleased to find by the presence of young oysters that spat is being disseminated over the bay. The present Government Reserves at Spring Bay are not, in our opinion, in the most favourable position, and we recommend that a new area be selected further to the west, where there is a good natural bottom better adapted for the purpose in every way.

4.—*Little Swanport.*

We also personally visited this locality, where there is a Government Reserve and two private beds. The same method of cultivation by artificial collectors and ambulances has been used in the Government enclosure. The increase of young oysters is excessively large, and in the highest degree satisfactory; every stone and broken piece of paling collector was covered with them. The artificial paling collectors appear to have a tendency to cause a flattened growth which destroys the shapeliness of the young oysters and makes it difficult to easily detach them when young, and was in marked contrast to those—both young and old—which were upon the private bed of Mr. Drake, cultivated under the ordinary natural conditions. These latter were very striking, and tend to prove that it would be more desirable to cultivate on the bottom on cultch stones or other similar material than by the present method of paling collectors, which, in addition to the fault already noticed, are quickly rendered useless by decay. We saw sufficient to indicate a very rapid and highly satisfactory development of the oyster in this locality.

5.—*Swansea.*

There is a Government bed at the mouth of the Swan River, which was not visited by us. The report of the Superintendent of Police is very meagre, and merely states that the bed "was in a good state when last visited."

6.—*George's Bay.*

There is a small Government Reserve of about a quarter of an acre, as to which the Superintendent of Police reports that about 10,000 oysters were laid down, and that on his inspection he "found about 30 per cent. of the oysters had died, the remainder were in a very healthy condition, and numbers of them had increased considerably in size since placed there. I also noticed a few young oysters, and, had arrangements been made for collecting the spat and keeping the oysters free from weeds and silt, I am of opinion there would have been a large increase in young oysters. Since the oysters have been placed there no attention whatever has been paid them, and in consequence the oysters in some places were completely covered with mud and silt."

7.—*River Tamar.*

A Government Reserve near George Town has been personally inspected. It had originally been laid down on the opposite shore, where a stock of 700 oysters had been placed which were procured from an existing natural bed at West Arm in the Tamar. After about 18 months these stock were found to be dying, and the survivors were removed to another position in Pipeclay Bay, near George Town, which had formerly been a natural oyster-bed. The mortality still continuing, a change was again made to a position about 500 yards below George Town Cove, where a further stock procured from Spring Bay was added, and also some hundreds of the Sydney rock oyster. When our inspection was made there remained a few native oysters in a very unhealthy state, some of which were opened and presented a watery, sickly appearance, and were evidently in a dying condition. The mortality of the whole stock had very nearly approached completion. The Sydney rock oysters had, however, survived, and were very healthy, but there was no evidence of spat visible to indicate a natural increase. The nature of this bottom appears to be more favorable to the Sydney rock oyster. The northern Members of the Board recommend that a further supply of these be laid down, and we concur in their recommendation. We have caused an examination to be made of the natural bed at West Arm from which the stock had been procured for the artificial bed. The bed was examined by the fisherman in charge of the Government Reserves (Stephen Andrews), and he was accompanied by the Superintendent of Police, George Town. Andrews writes:—"The bed is about 60 yards in circumference, covered with coral, which is a very good substance to catch spawn. I threw my dredge over four times, and on each occasion brought up from 10 to 15 oysters in all stages of growth. I saw very few dead ones. In my opinion the bed is doing very well. It is close to the shore at low water; near it is a small bay about 300 yards round which is covered with large stones; there are a large number of oysters on these stones; one I saw 10 on." The Superintendent of Police, in confirming Andrews' report, writes:—"There are a good many oysters at the mouth of Anderson's Creek, at the head of West Arm. During a portion of the year they are altogether in fresh water. The bed referred to by Andrews is over a mile further down. It is also covered with fresh water for weeks after heavy rains in winter. The oysters Mr. Kent took from the bed where they live for a time in fresh water were put where no fresh water could get to them, which fact may account for their dying. Oysters have recently been found in many places from here up to Middle Island, and at Kelso they were found growing on an old wreck in the cove here." From these reports it is evident that the natural conditions are at present favourable to the growth of oysters at the mouth of the Tamar, and with careful preservation the former abundance may be once more restored.

Speaking generally of the Government beds, it was observed that some were badly selected, as the oysters were too long exposed to the extremes of heat and cold at low tides, and in other cases the nature of the bottom was not suitable to the favourable development of oysters or for spatting purposes.

In the foregoing observations it will be noticed that we have dealt entirely with the Government Reserves, excepting a reference to the leased beds in Spring Bay and Little Swanport. Leases of private beds have been granted at Oyster Cove, where stock has been laid, but we are not aware that any great measure of success has been attained. A more recent lease has been granted of the whole of Cloudy Bay Lagoon at South Bruni, but we cannot say what steps have been taken by the lessee to perform the conditions of his lease. It is exceedingly gratifying to us to be in a position to express our opinion that in several localities, more notably Spring Bay, Little Swanport, and the River Tamar, natural conditions are now favourable to the successful revival of the oyster fishery of this Colony, which at one time was a source of so much wealth. The natural beds at Cole's Bay and off Schouten Island have for some time been steadily worked with success by W. Tapner, of Spring Bay, and from these beds the larger portion of stock has been procured for the supply of the private and Government beds laid down in the various localities we have mentioned.

No better evidence of the return of favourable conditions for the growth and spatting of the oyster can be given than the fact that on these natural beds where no artificial culture has been attempted, the signs of revival are even greater than shewn on the natural beds elsewhere where oyster reserves are cultivated.

The experience of former years will, it is hoped, be a guard against evils which have helped to destroy the industry as it formerly existed. Careful cultivation on the private beds, and a strict adherence to regulations against over-dredging on natural beds, must be enforced. There are but few persons in the Colony possessed of any experience in oyster culture, and it is gratifying to know that the present success on the East Coast is likely to lead to the cultivation of large areas of oyster ground, and to the early introduction from the known centres of oyster industry in Europe of persons skilled in the business of artificial oyster culture. If these persons are so introduced, and are carefully selected, we may reasonably hope that their practical acquaintance with the most modern artificial appliances used in the oyster beds of Europe will materially assist in the more rapid development of the industry in Tasmania.

We feel that the want of success attending the efforts made at Oyster Cove, Shipwrights' Point, and George's Bay will not justify any further large expenditure at those places. We propose, however, to establish experimental reserves from time to time in various localities where former natural beds were known to exist, and in this direction we recommend that beds be at once laid down in Pipeclay Lagoon, Frederic Henry Bay, where we believe the natural conditions to be in the highest degree favourable, and which, if successful, will, it is hoped, lead to private enterprise in a position easily accessible to a ready market in Hobart. We also recommend that a bed be laid down in the River Derwent above the City of Hobart, where many natural beds formerly existed, and where oysters are at the present time procurable in limited numbers; and we would advise the establishment of reserves at Barnes' Bay, Southport, and Esperance, and portions of the northern coast where natural beds formerly existed.

We think it desirable that after success has been attained on a Government Reserve, and private enterprise has followed by the establishment of successful private beds, that a Government Reserve should be kept merely as a spatting ground to avoid the possible exhaustion of stock by the overworking of private beds, and that in localities where success has not been great, the ground laid down be constituted a Government Reserve in the hope of success, but without incurring the expense of a caretaker.

We would earnestly bring under the notice of lessees of private reserves the great necessity for proper attention to the bottom of their beds. The former system of over-dredging has removed the cultch in the form of empty shells, and when there is abundance of suitable material it is in the highest degree desirable that a new bottom be prepared in order that means may be available for the collection of spat. At little Swanport immense banks of oyster shells line the edges of the shore, and these constitute a simple, cheap, and effective cultch if used freely and distributed regularly over the bottom of the ground.

It is worthy the consideration of those interested in the oyster industry whether the employment of a small steamer with proper dredging appliances along the coast line from Spring Bay up to Cole's Bay, and along Schouten Island, would not result in the discovery of natural oyster beds of considerable extent. We have already stated that large numbers of oysters have been procured on this coast for the stocking of the Government and private reserves, and this fact should, in our opinion, be a sufficient encouragement to private enterprise in the direction indicated.

We propose that the Government Reserves shall be of two Classes:—1st. Reserve areas under special paid caretakers; 2nd. Reserve areas under special supervision. It is suggested that the following beds be of the First Class, viz.:—Spring Bay, Little Swanport, River Tamar; and that the beds at Oyster Cove, Shipwrights' Point, and George's Bay be of the Second Class. We also recommend the establishment of Second Class reserves in the following places, viz.:—River Derwent, Pipeclay Lagoon, Barnes' Bay, Southport, Esperance, and in various parts of the northern coast, in regard to which we are now in communication with the northern members of the Board.

It may be a matter for the consideration of the Board whether some of the bays in which natural beds are known to exist should not be wholly closed for a time in order that the favourable conditions which now seem to be present shall not be disturbed by dredging the ground prematurely. We would indicate such bays as Barnes' Bay, Southport, and Port Esperance.

We have also fully considered the letter of the Honorable the Chief Secretary to the Board, dated 29th April last, in which he expresses his opinion that "in order to prevent confusion and possible litigation owing to the existing uncertainty as to the position of the areas leased and occupied for oyster culture in Spring Bay as shown on the chart supplied from the Survey Department when compared with the

descriptions and diagrams in the leases issued, that it is highly desirable an accurate survey should be made by an accredited surveyor," and asks that "the Fisheries Board would take this subject into their consideration with the object of adopting the best means of rectifying the existing very unsatisfactory position of affairs in connection with these leases."

When inspecting Spring Bay we had with us the Government chart, and there is no doubt whatever that the location of the leased beds on the chart does not correspond with their actual position in the bay. As the errors arise through no fault of the lessees, we recommend that an accurate survey be made by the Government Surveyor of the present leased enclosures at Spring Bay in order that the descriptions contained in the various leases may be tested, and any inaccuracies remedied by the cancellation of the old and the issue of new leases. The cost of such survey will not, we are informed, be expensive, and as several applications for leases at Spring Bay are at present under consideration, it is very important that the survey be made with the least possible delay in order that any further errors may be avoided.

RECAPITULATION.

The following is a brief recapitulation of the recommendations contained herein:—

1. Spring Bay.—Present Government Reserves to be abandoned in favour of a more suitable position.
2. River Tamar.—A further stock of rock oysters from Sydney to be laid down near George Town.
3. The establishment of new Government Reserves at Pipeclay Lagoon, River Derwent, Barnes' Bay, Esperance, Southport, and in various suitable areas on the northern coast.
4. The advisability of wholly closing certain bays where there are natural oyster beds.
5. To divide the various Government Reserves into two classes:—1. Under paid caretakers; 2. Under general supervision.
6. An accurate survey of the leased beds at Spring Bay, to set at rest the present uncertainty of their position, and to test the correctness of descriptions in the existing leases.

MATTHEW SEAL, *Chairman.*

12 August, 1889.