Revenue Department

Minutes of Consolidation

1st to 10th June 1859.

Book No. 22 & 23

Order No. 747 & 4th June 1859

747

No. 22. Read the following Memorandum on the Tinnevelly Pearl Banks, by JOHN J. FRANKLIN, Esq., Superintendent of Marine.

1. Having perused the correspondence that has taken place relative to the Pearl Banks off the Tinnevelly Coast, I venture to offer the following remarks in the hope that they may be of some slight service to the officers entrusted with their preservation.

2. There can be no doubt that the time has now arrived for again carefully watching the banks as the condition of the Oysters on many promise every prospect of a fishery in a year or two. In my report of the 18th April 1843, after my fourth and last examination, finding that the Oysters had disappeared in a most unaccountable manner while even too young to be worth the trouble of fishing, I recommended that the expense of guarding them should be discontinued, but that those which promised most success should be annually examined and that the others should undergo a similar scrutiny every third or fourth year. It was evident to me that some undiscovered cause was operating in preventing the Oysters coming to perfection. No doubt the fishing boats in dredging over them, destroyed many young ones, but the destruction from this cause alone could not be so complete as to carry off all the large Oysters. During my several examinations I obliged the divers to bring up pieces of the rock in order to examine its surface, and see if any Oysters had lately been detached; and the result proved th at not only were the banks thinly stocked but that from some cause unknown they were swept away before they attained any size.

3. If the failure of these banks had occurred for the first time in the period commencing from 1830, when the last fishery was held, there would have been more reason to believe that it was owing to some obstacle which careful attention might overcome; but in that report I sent in a statement of the banks fished since 1800, which shewed that they had been gradually deteriorating as a source of revenue since 1807. I remember also having seen some old Dutch reports lent me, I think, by the Collector of Tinnevelly, in which similar observations were recorded as to the fish occasionally abandoning the banks for years. Whether the effect was produced by over-fishing or clandestine fishing, or from other causes, has always been a matter of discussion; but now that they have returned, it is clearly our duty to watch their progress with careful attention, and at once to organize a guard for their effectual protection until they shall have arrived at that age when most fitted for fishing.

4. I have dwelt on the subject of their disappearance thus long because I perceive that Government still entertain the idea that the banks are pillaged. I do not think so and for two reasons.

1st. That until now none of the banks have been found in a state to repay the trouble of diving, as the oysters are seldom found with pearls till the age of 5 or 6, and until April 1858 none of the banks were found with a stock of more than three years growth. Six off Tuticorin were then reported to be well covered with healthy four-year-old oysters; but even these would not offer sufficient temptation as the chances of their containing pearls would be very small. Occasionally a heap of full grown dead shells is discovered by the divers, which at first sight does seem to strengthen the impression of the banks being plundered; but my opinion is that these have belonged to Oysters which have come to maturity in a favorable position sheltered by some projecting ridge, and that on their completing their seven years existence the protection which shielded them from harm during their lives prevented the dispersion of the shells after death.

2dly. Because the fact of their being pillaged would very soon transpire. The divers are a race vehemently given to stimulants, which when they have the means they will always obtain. They are divided into two sects of Romam Catholic Christians, who hate each other; and when I was in Tinnevelly several fracas took place between the parties, such as would occur between right and left hand castes. I feel satisfied that with these antagonisms any unlicensed fishing would speedily be brought to light.

5. The lastest examination took place in December last, when the Oysters on six banks off Tuticorin were found to be healthy and from 4 to 4½ years old. These require the most vigilant attention, they should be buoyed off and no fishing or shank diving permitted within, at the least, a mile of them. They ought to be well guarded, but from not knowing the names of the banks I cannot say what number of guard boats should be employed. Probably two will be sufficient which should proceed out daily and anchor in a position near them to warn off all intruders. With

these precautions there seems no reason to doubt that they will yield an excellent return in 1861, when they will have attained an age of between 6 and 7 years. Dr. Kelaart's opinion as to the age at which they should be fished will be very valuable and must be taken in preference to mine. If removed too soon, the pearls are imperfectly formed; and on the other hand if allowed to remain too long, the fish dies and is lost. This is therefore a point of great importance which can best be decided by one who has made their habits his particular study.

6. It would be a great aid to those entrusted with the examination of these banks if they were provided with the charts shewing their position. In 1843 I prepared two expressly for this purpose: each bank was therein mapped down, with the depth on and around it: and I would suggest that these be lithographed and a number of copies struck off. They should be backed to preserve them from wear and tear when used in the boats, and would, I am certain, be extremely convenient not only in indicating the banks to the examiners, but in enabling the Government to trace without difficulty those reported on.

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No. 23. ORDER THEREON, 4th June 1859, No. 747.

Ordered to be communicated to the Board of Revenue and through them to the Collector of Tinnevelly and to the Master Attendant of Tuticorin. A copy will also be sent to Dr. Kelaart.

2. The two charts referred to will be sent to the Chief Engineer to be lithographed with as little delay as possible; and copies will be sent to the same parties who will have received copies of this Report.

(Signed) J. D. BOURDILLON,
*Secretary to Government.*

Copy in a Letter to England
of 1st June 1860 No 54

12-2-72

G-10-085

No 2283.

Revenue 1859 Department
Cons 10th June No 989

Memorandum
on the
Tinnevelly Pearl Banks
from the
Supt of Marine.

d/ 31st May /59.

From Dr Kelaart No 18th June
1859 6 No 1187 in Cons 8th July
No 30
From the Chief Engr 5th July 1859
No 1245 in Cons 15th July
No 37 to 38

No 747 = 4th June 1859.

Transferred to the
Secy to Govt
(By order)
D. Hammerton
Govt House } Sd
1-6-59 } Asstt to order

No. 747.

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2 The two Charts referred to will be sent to the Chief Engineer to be lithographed with as little delay as possible; and copies will be sent to the same parties who will have received copies of this Report.

From Govt George
4th June /59
10 Copies to the Chief Engr with two Charts
4 — Dr Kelaart — 2 Copies to Supt of Marine