

**PRACTICAL FISHERMAN'S
CONGRESS.
COMPRISING THE
FOLLOWING SUBJECTS**

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Practical Fisherman's Congress. Comprising the Following Subjects by Various

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VARIOUS

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International Fisheries Exhibition

LONDON, 1883

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PRACTICAL
FISHERMEN'S CONGRESS

COMPRISING THE FOLLOWING SUBJECTS

DESTRUCTION OF IMMATURE FISH

HARBOUR ACCOMMODATION

BETTER MEANS FOR PREVENTION OF LOSS
OF LIFE AT SEA

RAILWAY RATES

FISHING VESSELS' LIGHTS

LONDON

WILLIAM CLOWES AND SONS, LIMITED

13 CHARING CROSS, S.W.

1884

Exchange
Mr. Birkbeck
5-27-30

PRACTICAL FISHERMEN'S CONGRESS.

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 26, 1883.

EDWARD BIRKBECK, Esq., M.P., in the Chair.

THE CHAIRMAN said he had great pleasure in opening the Practical Fishermen's Conferences, and on behalf of the Executive Committee, of himself, and the public, he thought he might say that no greater interest could possibly have arisen in connection with these conferences than the final ones, which were to be discussed, as he hoped, by practical fishermen themselves. The subjects placed on the agenda were all matters of vital importance to the fishing interest, and to the public at large, and he proposed to take them in the order in which they appeared. The first was as to the destruction of immature fish; the second, harbour accommodation; the third, better means for prevention of loss of life at sea; the fourth, railway rates; and an additional one had just been sent in, namely, the question of fishing vessels' lights. All those were matters of very great interest, and he was quite sure that when the time came for all the unique collections which would be published by the executive committee, of all the discussions which had taken place, together with the essays

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and the handbooks which would be printed, that the Practical Fishermen's Congress would form a most interesting and important addition to that work. He had now great pleasure in opening the question of the destruction of immature fish. It was a subject which had already been discussed to a great extent by various authorities, some of them very high authorities indeed, and by some of their foreign friends who had attended the conferences. The matter had never been placed on the agenda before, though it had been indirectly introduced into various discussions, prominently by Professor Huxley, when he alluded to the question in his opening address. He was himself more and more impressed that it was a subject of the greatest possible difficulty, and he thought that many persons had not borne in mind that it was an international question, and one that it would be impossible for them as a nation to deal with alone. If anything is to be done, in his opinion, it must be done in an international point of view. In saying that, it must be palpable to every one that they had no jurisdiction as a nation beyond their territorial waters, which is the three-mile limit. Therefore, supposing for one moment that any Bill was introduced into Parliament as affecting the destruction of immature fish, it could only have jurisdiction within the three-mile limit, so that if the English fishermen were to be in any way restricted in the capture of immature fish, the French, Dutch, Germans, or any other nation could do what they liked just beyond that limit; they could laugh at the English fishermen for being restricted, and could capture any amount of immature fish and send them to the foreign markets or to the English markets. Therefore, an injustice would be done to the English fishermen if they were restricted and the foreigners were

allowed to do what they liked. That being so, it was clearly an international matter, and one which alone could be brought to a satisfactory conclusion by an international conference—he did not mean such a conference as had taken place at the Exhibition, but a duly authorised conference such as took place at The Hague two years ago, a conference in which he was specially interested, and worked hard for many years to obtain. The Conference at the Hague was a most satisfactory one, and if anything was to be done to prevent the destruction of immature fish, it would possibly be done upon the same lines as upon that occasion. With regard to the destruction of immature fish, Mr. Jex, who had kindly consented to introduce the subject to the meeting, would point out what was going on in all directions; he would probably refer to the size of the mesh of the nets used round the coasts of the United Kingdom, and the sizes of the fish brought into the market; but there was another point which he wished to mention, namely, that probably the scarcity of fish had arisen in a great measure from the extraordinarily increased demand. Fish was now sent to every town throughout the kingdom by means of the railways and the parcels' post, and he had learned on excellent authority that even through the Exhibition the demand for fish had palpably increased, no doubt owing to the cheap fish dining-room, in which an enormous quantity of fish had been consumed. Even Boards of Guardians were now giving fish dinners to the paupers once a week, which in itself would create an increased demand. No doubt the fishing-grounds had been fished to a most extraordinary extent, and owners had now to send their fleets and smacks to a distance which was never contemplated years ago. All he could say as regarded the Exhibition

was, that he confidently hoped there were inventions which had been exhibited which would enable the owners to prosecute their fisheries at a far greater distance than they contemplated before, and in that way the supply might be kept up. He alluded especially to the adoption of steam. The Executive Committee at the outset, when they framed their classification, thought it was most important that a special prize should be given for the best trawl net for preventing the destruction of immature fish, and though the report of the Jurors in connection with those exhibits had not yet been made public, he had had an opportunity of reading it, and he regretted to say that the Jurors could not find any exhibit in the Exhibition which was worthy of the special prize that the Committee offered. One point which had struck him, as regards this great question, was that it might be found by an International Conference, or by the Legislature, that a move in the right direction would be to pass a law prohibiting the sale of immature fish. He did not wish to express an opinion strongly one way or the other, but it was a point which is worthy of consideration. If the smack owners sent small fish up to market, whether it was to Billingsgate, Birmingham, Manchester, or anywhere else, and they found that the sale of small fish would not be allowed, then he felt confident that they would at once come to the conclusion that it was not worth their while to pay the excessively high railway rates which they had to pay, and have their fish confiscated. He had very much pleasure in calling upon Mr. Jex to introduce the subject of the destruction of immature fish.

Mr. JEX said this was a vast and important subject, not only to English fishermen, but to all nations of the world. Immature fish were being destroyed, not only by British

fishermen round the British coast, but by fishermen of all countries fishing in the same waters, and even in all parts of the world. That Conference had more particularly to deal with the destruction of immature fish upon the British coast, and therefore he would take the matters in proper rotation. He trusted that after many gentlemen had expressed their opinions in that room, the further consideration of the subject would be adjourned until there was a better representation of fishermen present, and that the wardens of the Fishmongers' Company would consent to lend their hall for the purpose of the matter being further discussed in the month of January. Drift-net fishing was in full operation as well as the trawl-net, and long-line and hand-line, consequently the present was a most inopportune time for holding the Conference. In the fishing population of the British islands, he might say there were not nine out of ten who believed in theoretical men, but rather in the practical man who had worked from his boyhood in every branch of fishery. One gentleman, who was a very high theoretical authority, lately said that the fishermen of England should be allowed to use what net they liked, to fish when they liked and how they liked, but that was what he should call extermination. Many of these theoretical people put views before the practical man that the practical man would not look at at all, as they were wrong altogether, and he did not think he should be far wrong in saying that ninety-eight out of one hundred of the fishing population did not believe in them. In the first place, he would deal with the drift-net fishery. Before the repeal of the Sea Fisheries Act, in 1868, no one could use a net for the capture of herrings with a mesh of less than one and a quarter inch, but since the repeal of the Act he had measured no less than twenty herring

nets with a mesh of thirteen-sixteenths of an inch at Yarmouth and Denes during the past week. The nets to which he referred were particularly used by his brethren from over the border, the Scotchmen from Banff, and that neighbourhood. When these nets were used, they were acted upon by the action of the sea, the result being that the large fish which struck the net were nosed, the greater proportion of the large fish being lost, and only the small taken. He thought it was quite time that the Government took the subject in hand, and defined the mesh of net to be used. He quite agreed that the mesh should not be forced upon British fishermen unless a convention could be made with other countries, with all the fishermen fishing in the same waters. The mackerel net was used in much the same way as the drift-net, but the mesh of that as used by the people on the east coast was twenty-seven meshes to the yard, and was used in the same way, but many were now using thirty-two and thirty-three meshes to the yard. No doubt that acted in the same way with mackerel as the drift-net did for herrings. Of course they could not make a convention as to that without all the other countries agreed. Pilchard were captured by the drift-net of forty to forty-two meshes to the yard, and the question now for consideration was whether the mesh was too small or too large. That subject was one which he hoped the practical men now present would deal with. The garvie or sprat was also caught by the drift-net, and he held in his hand a sprat-net obtained from Leigh, in Essex, of a very small mesh, and, of course, those present would understand that the mesh was smaller when wet than when in a dry state, the consequences being, that when such a net was used the small fish could not escape. It had been said by gentlemen of high theoretical authority