

1923

KENYA

60147

11 DEC 23

FROM  
MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE  
& FISHERIES

DATE  
10TH DECEMBER 1923

FOR CIRCULATION:

Mr. *Bottomley*  
Mr.  
Mr.  
Asst. U.S. of S.

SUBJECT  
BECHE-de-MER INDUSTRY

Trs memo. on subject.

Perm<sup>t</sup> U.S. of S.  
Part<sup>r</sup> U.S. of S.  
Secretary of State

Previous Paper

MINUTES

*I think it will be sufficient to send  
the spare copy of the memo to  
Kenya in a short despatch suggesting  
that if they want further information  
they should apply to the Madras  
Govt.; & ackn. & thank.*

*J.H.  
11.12.23*

*Yes [Kenya must suffer  
through distance from market].*

*W.C.S. 12.12.23  
to Lorne*

Subsequent Paper

*19 DEC 1923 ✓  
Memo to Govt. Madras - 20 Dec 23 ✓  
Copy Memo to Govt. Madras - 26 Feb 24 ✓  
5947/2 ✓  
by *[initials]**

Telephone:—VICTORIA 8700.

EXTENSION \_\_\_\_\_

Telegrams:—FISHERIES, PARL, LONDON.

440

MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES.

To avoid delay, address all communications to—

THE FISHERIES SECRETARY.

Reference No. **F.G. 1879.**



43, PARLIAMENT STREET,  
LONDON, S.W.

C.O.  
60147

11 DEC 23

10<sup>th</sup> December, 1923.

205  
65796  
Sir,

I am directed to refer to your letter of 27th ult., inquiring whether the Ministry can furnish certain information, relating to the Bêche-de-Mer industry, which is desired by the Governor of Kenya, and I am to transmit, to be laid before the Duke of Devonshire, a memorandum (in duplicate) prepared by the Ministry from the information available on the subject.

I am, Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

The Under Secretary of State,  
Colonial Office,  
S.W.1.

440

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CC147

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The Under Secretary of State,  
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S.W.1.

MEMORANDUM ON THE BECHE DE MER INDUSTRY.GENERAL.

Beche-de-Mer also known as Trepang is a marine food greatly esteemed by the Chinese. It consists of the dried body wall of certain large Holothurians - (animals known in England as Sea-cucumbers belonging to the Zoological class of Rehinerodermata). The principal commercial species of India & Ceylon is Holothuria scabra (vallai attai or white beche-de-Mer). Holothuria spinifer or "red fish" is superior but is not abundant. Stichopus chlorotus (Brandt) is very abundant but the body wall is very thin and the commercial value small. The most valued Australian species is Stichopus variegatus (Semper) with a market value of £130 - £150 per ton. Holothuria scabra is not esteemed in the Malay Archipelago owing to the enormous abundance of tiny spicules in the skin forming a chalky layer which has to be removed, and other species are used whose names I am not able to discover.

CURING.

An excellent account of the Indian Beche-de-Mer industry is given by Mr. James Hornell (1917) who gives statistics of the exports from India as far as they are available. The average amount exported from 1898 to 1909 was 12,175 lbs. Since 1910 these exports had fallen off to 2,991 lbs per annum (in 1916). They are usually shipped to Penang. The great increase in exports is due, not to any scarcity of the Beche-de-Mer but to the deterioration of the quality. The main curing stations were in the hands of the Chinese who worked on approved methods and produced a satisfactory article. Their trade was cut out by Indian merchants who by careless methods turned out a very inferior article which ruined the trade. The correct method of curing is given in Mr. Hornell's paper; briefly recapitulated it is as follows:-

The animals as soon as possible are put into shallow cauldrons over a fierce fire for about 50 minutes till the animals have shrunk to  $\frac{1}{2}$  their size and give out a cooked odour. They are then buried in sand near the water and kept moist by pouring on sea water. Here they remain from 12 - 18 hours till ripe, then they are disinterred one by one, the curer running over each with his thumb to loose and dislodge some of the chalky incrustation, and are thrown into wide shallow baskets. When these are half full a curer jumps in and treads out the mass while another throws on sea water - this removes the chalky deposit. After a final rinsing they are replaced in the cauldrons with enough sea water to cover them and brought to boiling point. Afterwards they are laid on mats and either dried wholly or partly in the sun or in a smoke house over wood smoke. The animals eviscerate themselves either before curing or in the cauldron.

In Australia and Malaysia the method is different :-

On arrival the Beche-de-Mer are boiled in cauldrons for twenty minutes, then they are taken out split up

/longitudinally

longitudinally and exposed to the sun on the ground till most of the moisture has evaporated. The largest specimens are spread open on wooden splints. They are then transferred to a smoke house and laid on wires of wire netting and smoked for about 24 hours, the wood generally used is red mangrove. By that time they have greatly shrunk and resemble charred sausages and are ready for market.

Mr. Hornell established a Government curing establishment Tirupalakudi in conjunction with the Chank fisheries. According to his latest "Administrative Report for 1921 - 1922" the factory shows a small profit.

#### TRADE.

The principal market for Beehe-de-Mer is China and Hongkong. Penag and Singapore appear to serve however as clearing houses for receiving and despatching the products from the Dutch Indies, Borneo, India, etc. According to Hornell, who gives statistics of the quantities and values of the imports and exports from these places, the trade is of considerable importance on the Australian coast. The industry is carried on over a considerable part of the Indian Ocean, Melanesia, Australasia and the Pacific Ocean generally, the Philippine Islands and Dutch Borneo producing large quantities. The total quantity in 1916 imported for reshipping into Singapore and Penang from India, Australia, Borneo, the Philippines and many other countries amounted approximately to 508 tons and had a value of about \$221,365 (a dollar = 4/2). The demand appears to be considerable. In French Indo-China a considerable industry is carried on by Chinese.

#### METHOD OF FISHING.

The animals are gathered by hand by wading in shallow water or diving in deepwater. The largest specimens on the Indian coast are in deepwater.

#### SEASONAL PROTECTION.

I have been unable to ascertain whether any such regulations are in force. There is no mention of them in Hornell's report, there did not appear to be any restrictions necessary as the supply was equal to the demand. Little is known about the reproduction of Holothuridae but some of the tropical species are known to breed throughout the year. The number of eggs varies from 5 to several hundreds but the exact limits are not known even in one species.

#### LITERATURE.

- |              |   |
|--------------|---|
| Clarke, H.C. | The Apodous Holothurians. Smithsonian Contributions to Knowledge. Vol. LXXV (No. 1723) (sec 7) 1907.  |
| Hornell, J.  | The Indian Beehe-de-Mer Industry - its History and recent revival. Madras Fishery Bulletin XI Report No. 4 for 1917. Administrative Report for the year 1921-22. Madras Fisheries Bulletin Vol. XVII. No. 1 for 1923. |

APPENDIX.

Quantity and Value of "Beche de Mer" obtained in Australia during the ten years 1911 - 1920. Extracted from the official Year books of Australia.

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Year.	Quantity. Tons.	Value. £.
1911	323	17,712
1912	450	25,142
1913	625	30,943
1914	531	27,847
1915	770	40,078
1916	513	30,222
1917	624	42,064
1918	468	48,933
1919	308	42,721
1920	-	70,898

NOTE:- The Beche-de-Mer industry is carried on in Queensland and the Northern Territory.

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No. 60147/23 Kenya

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O. D.  
R. 18 DEC.  
D 18

DRAFT.

19 Dec 1923

Fisheries Secretary,  
Ministry of Agriculture  
& Fisheries.

Sir,

I am to advise with

MINUTE.

thanks the recd. of your  
letter, F.S. 1879, of the  
10<sup>th</sup> of Dec, transmitting  
a memo on the beche-  
de-mer industry.

Mr. Benn Dec. 17

Mr. Calder 17.12/

Mr.

Sir C. Davis.

Sir G. Prindle.

Sir H. Read.

Sir J. Macartain Smith.

Mr. Omsby-Gore.

Duke of Devonshire.

JTC

(Signed) H. J. READ

ms



No. 60147/23 Kenya

443

Ind

~~Se~~

C. D.  
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19 Dec 1923

Fisheries Secretary,  
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- Mr. Calder 17/12/
- Mr. [unclear]
- Sir C. [unclear]
- Sir G. [unclear]
- Sir H. [unclear]
- Sir J. Masterton Smith
- Mr. Omsby-Gore.
- Duke of Devonshire.

JRC

(Signed) H. J. READ

mbp

No. 60147/23 Kenya

Handwritten initials

Handwritten initials

DRAFT.

20 Dec 1923

Kenya No

1751

For Commdn.

MINUTE.

8557

96/23

I have to ack. the rec<sup>d</sup> of your desq, No. 1567, of the 15<sup>th</sup> of Oct<sup>r</sup>, & to transmit to you the account. memo. on the Beche-de-mer industry which has been furnished by the Board of Agriculture & Fisheries.

- Mr. Brett Dec 17
- Mr. Calder 17.12/
- Mr.
- Sir C. Davis.
- Sir G. Girdle.
- Sir H. Road.
- Sir J. Masterton Smith.
- Mr. Ormsby-Gore.
- Duke of Devonshire.

Handwritten flourish

Handwritten signature

Handwritten initials

No 60147/23 Kenya

Ind

13

DRAFT.

20 Dec 1923

Kenya  
No

1751

Mr Comptroller

MINUTE.

Mr. Brew Dec 17

Mr. Gelder 17.12

Mr.

Sir C. Davis

Sir G. Girdle

Sir H. Road

Sir J. Easterton Smith

Mr. Ormsby-Gore

Duke of Devonshire

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Str 557

96/23

f

1. If you desire any

further info on the subject

I would suggest ~~you apply~~ that you should communicate

with the <sup>0</sup>Wt of Madras.

Jc

Signed DEVONSEIRE

2. If you desire any  
further inf<sup>n</sup> on the Subject

I would suggest ~~you applying~~ <sup>that you should communicate</sup>  
with  
to the Govt. of Madras.

Jc

Signed DEVONSHIRE