

YESTERDAY'S NEWS.15

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'Sir John Sutherland concluded his inquiries in Argyll on behalf of the Scottish Economic Development Council [predecessor of the Highlands and Islands Development Board] at Tiree on June 16.

'Brigadier-General Stewart of Breachacha Castle, Coll; Mr John M. Brown, Scarinish Hotel, Tiree; and Mr Archibald Currie, Kilkenneth, Tiree, were co-opted for the purposes of the inquiry, and Mr C. L. Davidson represented the Department of Agriculture.

'The question of reviving the kelp industry was raised. There were several suggestions pertaining to the conditions in the island. Something ought to be done about fishing, which it was alleged by several of those present had been spoiled by trawlers. It had been possible at one time to get good supplies of fish, which were salted, dried and then marketed; now it was not worth while putting a boat out. Housing, roads and egg marketing were among matters which also claimed attention.

'Mr Donald Sinclair, crofter, Heynish West, who gave evidence first, was asked if he knew of any other way of getting work into the island other than work at the kelp industry, said the islands were in need of roads. At the west end there were practically no roads, but they could be made by the continuation of the old roads. A road was needed from Balevullin up to Balephuil, a distance of about eight miles. Some parts of the main road were in need of repair. He suggested that the Government should give the crofters the benefit of the subsidy for oats and barley, although they were not marketing these products. If they were to send oats and barley to the market, the high freights would not allow them to compete with Moray and Banff.

'That the trawlers were responsible for the failure of local fishing was the opinion of Mr Lachlan MacDonald, fisherman and landholder at Heynish West, who resides at Balemartine. His boat, he said, had been drawn up on the shore about three years ago. It would not pay him to put his boat out (although it was capable of going out to the Skerryvore grounds), because the fishing grounds had been spoiled by the trawlers. It had been possible before the [First World] war to fill the boats with fish a hundred yards from the shore. Every conceivable kind of boat was used to take in fish. Referring to the area between Skerryvore and Barra Head being covered by a mass of trawlers, Mr MacDonald made out that the fishing outside Tiree did not bring any benefit to the island. He said Tiree ought to have a harbour, the same as Castlebay and other ports. A safe harbour could be made at Heynish to accommodate the boats taking part. The position at present was that fish caught off Tiree and taken to Castlebay could be shipped to Gott Bay and sold opposite the part from which it had been taken.

‘There were ten lobster fishermen on the island, and there had been as many as twenty boats taking part in the lobster fishing at one time. In regard to the prices obtained, it was explained by Mr Brown that they were at the mercy of the merchants in London. They had no check on the London market. Referring to the plentiful fishing to be had at one time on the Coll Banks, Mr MacDonald said a local steamer called to take loads away for railing to Glasgow from Oban. Regarding a reference to East Coast fishermen getting assistance from the State, it was pointed out that the assistance applied to the whole of Scotland. Continuing, it was stated, in reply to a question about crews for boats, that the boats were there, but it was not worthwhile to go out in them, and there were no harbours to keep the boats in any case.

‘House-letting would be an advantage to the island, said Mr Malcoim MacArthur, Middleton. The crofts would require to be supplied with sanitary accommodation. The water supply in some parts of the island was poor, but this might be remedied by the erection of windmills, which, although expensive, would give the necessary force for an adequate supply. There had been one at Island House for the last thirty years. To bring tourists to the island, a daily steamer service should be inaugurated, said Mr MacArthur, in suggesting further improvements. It might even be possible to have a three days’ a week boat service and three days’ a week airplane services. There was no way at present of getting round the island by road. The roads would need to be joined, and there was no road on the west side of the island.

‘There was ground for a golf course to compare with Machrihanish on the Reef at Tiree. where a landing ground for aeroplanes could also be established, it was stated by Mr Colin MacPhail, Crossapol. The Reef, on which there were 1100 acres or more, was also the common grazing. Only one objector was holding up the proposal, he said. The estate wanted £32 a year for an area of 400 square yards—more than £1 per acre. Over and above that, it was going to cost £140 prepare the ground. Of ground rental the tenants were to receive half. The telegraph wires would have to be put down by the aeroplane company.’ (*Oban Times and Argyllshire Advertiser*, 26 June 1937, p. 2)