

FISHERY PRODUCTS PRODUCTION AT BOSTON FISH PIER, 1948

(LANDINGS, PRICES AND TRENDS)

By John J. O'Brien*

PRODUCTION

Introduction: In 1948, 5,076 trips with 199,459,193 pounds of fish and scallops were landed at the Boston Fish Pier and sold over the New England Fish Exchange for \$16,116,592.03, or a weighted ex-vessel average price of \$8.08 per hundredweight (Table 1). Landings decreased one percent compared with 1947

Species	1 9 4 8			1 9 4 7		
	Trips	Quantity	Avg. Price	Trips	Quantity	Avg. Price
	No.	Lbs.	\$ per Cwt.	No.	Lbs.	\$ per Cwt.
Blackback	1,391	1,679,635	11.14	1,550	2,143,054	10.53
Cod, large ^{1/}	3,494	16,393,263	8.05	3,257	18,433,988	6.91
Cod, market ^{2/}	3,970	18,116,983	7.38	4,111	15,563,333	6.68
Cusk	1,539	1,008,629	5.79	956	439,839	5.71
Dab	1,995	1,121,115	8.72	2,072	1,553,198	7.66
Gray sole	1,574	1,003,254	11.48	1,848	1,875,577	8.92
Haddock	3,099	58,175,348	9.95	3,649	69,839,620	8.71
Haddock scrod	3,037	47,159,610	8.44	3,491	37,129,805	6.51
Hake ^{3/}	2,818	3,339,147	7.12	2,950	3,354,534	6.23
Halibut	860	230,597	23.93	1,009	331,770	28.65
Lemon sole	1,057	2,051,285	13.90	1,264	2,734,160	11.50
Mackerel ^{4/}	260	3,468,997	7.39	472	13,333,052	5.86
Pollock	3,184	17,670,755	4.49	2,104	7,993,683	4.59
Rosefish (Redfish)	1,156	11,382,201	4.37	956	10,536,686	4.54
Swordfish	23	303,107	50.46	64	732,343	50.26
Whiting ^{5/}	1,391	11,377,746	4.39	1,239	10,263,372	4.24
Wolfish (Catfish)	1,998	1,164,803	9.26	2,234	1,522,493	6.60
Yellowtail	1,164	3,258,375	6.66	1,646	3,220,652	6.29
Scallops, sea	48	220,532	52.86	35	261,036	50.38
Miscellaneous ^{6/}	544	333,811	3.95	364	61,691	8.63
Total	5,076	199,459,193	8.08	5,466	201,323,886	7.37

1/Includes whale cod.
2/Includes cod scrod.
3/Consists of red and white hake.
4/Consists of landings by seiners and gill netters.
5/Consists of round, steak, and dressed whiting.
6/Includes butterfish, sea herring, shad, sharks, sturgeon, rajafish, etc.

(5,466 trips with 201,323,886 pounds). Although still far below the prewar annual average of 282,392,426 pounds for the four-year period 1938 through 1941, landings in 1948 were still higher than for any year from 1942 through 1946.

This was the second postwar year during which operations were carried on free of restrictions, and the prewar level of production seems out of reach of the producing ability of the Boston fishing fleet operating under present conditions. Very little new construction has been carried on to augment the fleet and to compensate for the shorter and smaller trips now being made. The relative scarcity of fish on the usual fishing banks and the high cost of labor and materials have prevented producers from risking further investments to expand their production potentiality.

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Preliminary tabulations of total landings received from other fishing ports show that Boston tied with San Diego, California, for third place, behind San Pedro, California (460,000,000 pounds), and Gloucester, Mass., (250,000,000 pounds).



TWO LINE TRAWLERS DOCKED AT THE BOSTON FISH PIER. ONLY TWO OF THIS TYPE NOW FISHING OUT OF BOSTON.

Production by Species: Although 1948 landings were slightly under 2 million pounds below 1947, there were some noticeable changes in the totals of individual species when compared with 1947.

The two main varieties, haddock and cod, both showed a trend toward smaller-sized fish. Large haddock decreased 11,664,272 pounds, and haddock scrod increased 10,029,805 pounds; large cod decreased 2,040,725 pounds, market cod increased 2,553,650 pounds. These figures bear out the complaints of the fishermen that in addition to the scarcity of fish, those caught are running smaller in size.

Pollock landings increased 9,677,072 pounds, with no restrictions on production in effect. Due to the poor market for pollock in 1947, fishermen had refused to land any pollock for a time, and then later only in limited quantities.

Since mackerel purse seiners had one of their worst seasons in years, the mackerel catch declined 9,864,055 pounds.

Whiting, landings of which increased 1,114,374 pounds, is becoming more important to the fisheries of Boston and New England each year due to the expansion of the Middle West market for this variety.

Cusk, yellowtail, and rosefish landings increased, while decreases were noted for blackback, dab, gray sole, halibut, lemon sole, swordfish, wolffish, and sea scallops.

Comparison of Offshore and Inshore Landings: Offshore vessels (over 50 gross tons) during the year landed 162,381,036 pounds or 81 percent of the total catch and the inshore craft (mostly under 50 gross tons) landed 37,078,157 pounds or 19 percent, compared to 85 and 15 percent, respectively, for 1947 (Table 2). Haddock and scrod haddock (99,762,480 pounds) accounted for 62 percent of the total offshore catch; large cod and market cod, 19 percent; pollock, 8 percent; with the remaining 11 percent made up of flounders and other varieties.

All the whiting landed was brought in by the inshore craft, and accounted for 30 percent of the total inshore landings. The remainder of the inshore landings was comprised of rosefish (16 percent), haddock and scrod haddock (15



MACKEREL SEINERS AND SEINE BOATS AT THE BOSTON FISH PIER GETTING THEIR GEAR IN SHAPE FOR A TRIP.

Table 2 - Landings by Offshore Vessels and Inshore Craft at Boston Fish Pier, 1948

Species	Offshore		Inshore		T o t a l		
	Lbs.	%	Lbs.	%	Combined Lbs.	Offshore %	Inshore %
Blackback	1,336,770	1	342,865	1	1,679,635	80	20
Cod, large ^{1/}	14,212,120	9	2,181,143	6	16,393,263	87	13
Cod, market ^{2/}	16,222,280	10	1,894,703	5	18,116,983	90	10
Cusk	356,095	*	652,534	2	1,008,629	35	65
Dab	516,410	*	604,705	1	1,121,115	46	54
Gray sole	389,347	*	613,907	2	1,003,254	39	61
Haddock	54,425,055	34	3,750,293	10	58,175,348	94	6
Haddock, scrod	45,337,425	28	1,822,185	5	47,159,610	96	4
Hake ^{3/}	899,800	1	2,439,347	7	3,339,147	27	73
Halibut	222,627	*	7,970	*	230,597	97	3
Lemon sole	2,035,090	1	16,195	*	2,051,285	99	1
Mackerel ^{4/}	3,390,495	2	78,502	*	3,468,997	98	2
Pollock	13,172,910	8	4,497,845	12	17,670,755	75	25
Rosefish (Redfish)	5,492,785	3	5,889,416	16	11,382,201	48	52
Swordfish	302,959	*	148	*	303,107	100	*
Whiting ^{5/}	-	-	11,377,746	30	11,377,746	-	100
Wolfish (Catfish)	944,970	1	219,833	1	1,164,803	81	19
Yellowtail	2,837,230	2	421,145	1	3,258,375	87	13
Scallops, sea	220,532	*	-	-	220,532	100	-
Miscellaneous ^{6/}	66,136	*	267,675	1	333,811	20	80
Total	162,381,036	100	37,078,157	100	199,459,193	81	19

*Less than one-half of one percent.
^{1/}Includes whale cod.
^{2/}Includes cod scrod.
^{3/}Consists of red and white hake.
^{4/}Consists of landings by seiners and gill netters.
^{5/}Consists of round, steak, and dressed whiting.
^{6/}Includes butterfish, sea herring, shad, sharks, sturgeon, rajafish, etc.

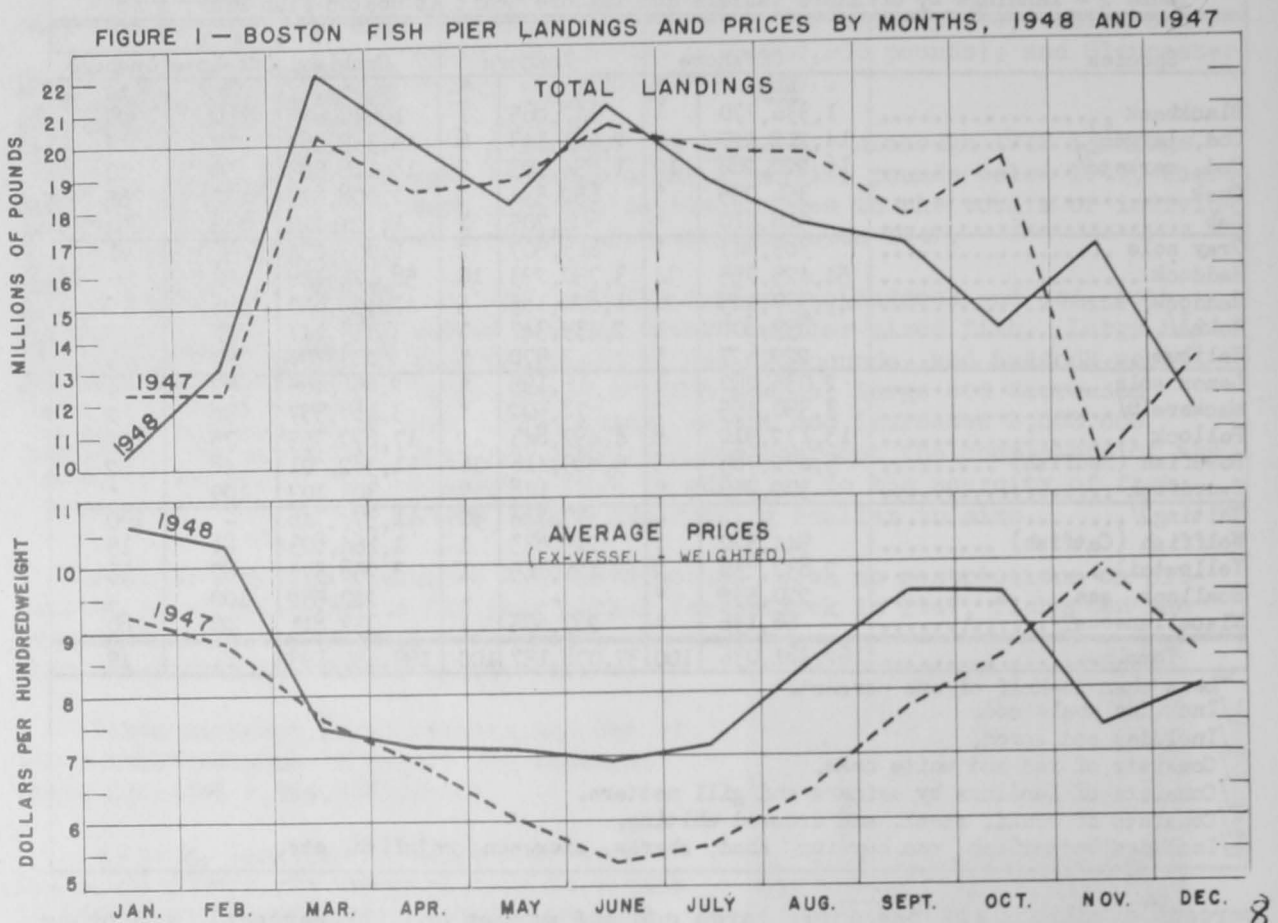
percent), pollock (12 percent), large cod and market cod (11 percent), and other species (16 percent).

Monthly Distribution of Production: The heavy production period in 1948 was between March and September, when milder weather permits smoother fishing operations at sea, and when the inshore fleet is more active (Figure 1, see page 8). March, with landings of 22,105,837 pounds, was the month of highest production for the first time since 1940. June had been the leading month for the past three years. The month of lowest production was January in 1948 and November in 1947.

Monthly landings followed the same trend in 1948 as they did in 1947, with the exception of October and November. There is a wide variety of weather conditions in the North Atlantic during these fall months, and production is unpredictable. Relationship of production to prices is evident by the relative decline in prices which results with increased landings.

Fishing Fleet and Average Catch Per Trip: The 1948 average offshore trip of 93,161 pounds for the 1,701 offshore trips (exclusive of mackerel seiners, swordfish harpooners, and scallop druggers) increased 22 percent over the 1947 average of 76,494 pounds. Catch limitations in effect during most of 1947 accounted for that year's low trip average. However, the 1948 average trip is well below the prewar average.

Offshore trips were generally limited to nine days (dock to dock) for vessels fishing on Georges Bank, and ten days for trips farther east. These time



limitations are self-imposed to assure higher quality fish and the resultant higher prices, but result in smaller catches. However, the soundness of this practice is evident in the fewer resales compared to prewar trips, when poor quality of the older fish brought as many as five sell overs. No other restrictions or limitations were in effect during 1948 to hamper the operations of the offshore fleet.

As has been the practice for the past several years, offshore vessels did most of their fishing on Georges Bank where haddock and cod are the most abundant species. Some trips were made farther east to Western Bank, while a few trips were made to the Channel. However, due to its proximity to Boston, the Channel has been almost "fished out," and longer trips to the other grounds are necessary. Fishermen have been complaining for the past number of years on the scarcity of haddock on Georges Bank, due to the recent extensive fishing. The Service's Branch of Fishery Biology has carried on extensive investigations of the haddock on Georges Bank to find the cause of this reported gradual depletion, and to suggest corrective measures.

At the end of the year, the Boston offshore fishing fleet consisted of 52 large otter trawlers (over 150 gross tons), 9 medium otter trawlers (50 to 150 gross tons), and 2 line trawlers. Vessels from other ports, mostly medium otter trawlers, made a number of trips to Boston supplementing the production of the local fleet. During the year, three new large trawlers were added to the fleet and one former trawler returned from Government service. Lost to the fleet were four trawlers sold to Canadian and Newfoundland interests, and three vessels that went into apparent retirement.

On December 20, the Army announced its plan to purchase a number of large fishing vessels for loan to Bizone Germany.^{1/} From the specifications announced, it was evident that all these vessels would come from the local fleet. Boat owners were receptive to the idea provided a satisfactory price was offered, while fishermen complained that they would suffer from the loss of a number of vessels. Such a reduction without some replacement will greatly reduce the future fishery production at Boston.

The inshore fleet, comprising 15 medium and 30 small otter trawlers (under 50 gross tons) and 22 small line trawlers, had a successful year. Weather plays an important part in the operations of these smaller craft, and in 1948, there were only very few periods when they were handicapped by foul weather. These craft made 3,103 trips with an average trip of 11,949 pounds, compared to 2,898 trips with an average trip of 10,634 pounds in 1947.



MEDIUM OTTER TRAWLERS DOCKED AT THE BOSTON FISH PIER.

The inshore craft confined their activities mostly to Massachusetts Bay. Otter trawlers (draggers) fished for whiting from May to November, and cod and pollock the remainder of the year, with occasional trips for rosefish. Line trawlers, operating closer to shore, fished mostly for cod and had-dock.



UNLOADING AND BARRELING MACKEREL AT BOSTON FISH PIER.

On June 8, the Massachusetts Legislature enacted a bill which prohibited the operation of draggers within the three-mile limit along most of the Massachusetts coast. This bill's restrictions would affect the draggers' operations in mid-summer when it is often necessary to "chase" the whiting quite close to shore, and again during the winter when foul weather forces them to fish closer to shore. This bill was passed without the knowledge of the local fishermen, and at the request of lobstermen who claimed damage to and loss of their gear by dragging operations. A move has been started by the local draggers through their association to put through a revised bill which will open some of the areas during the winter months.

There were no new developments in the gear used or fishing methods practiced by the fleet. However, the fishermen are always receptive to new ideas which might improve the efficiency of their gear and benefit them economically. The gear and equipment industry has worked closely with the fishermen in this respect.

Fishermen continued to operate under the same lay as in 1947. This lay divides the gross stock with 60 percent for the fishermen and 40 percent for the boat owner, after certain deductions.

^{1/}Twelve large otter trawlers from the Boston fleet were sold to the Army in 1949.

Seasonal Fisheries Have Poor Year: The 1948 mackerel season was a very poor one. Only 260 mackerel fares with 3,468,997 pounds were hailed, mostly by purse seiners, at the Boston Fish Pier during the year. This is 74 percent below 1947 when 472 fares landed 13,333,052 pounds. Except for a short period during June and July, the seiners made very few successful trips. From the first part of August to the end of the season only a few large schools of mackerel could be located, and many seiners converted back to trawling earlier than anticipated. Tuna and blackfish (a whale), common enemies of the mackerel, were observed following the mackerel schools in larger number than for some years, and the scattering of the mackerel schools was attributed to them.

Only 22 trips with 303,107 pounds of swordfish were landed by swordfish harpooners during the year, while in 1947, there were 64 trips with 732,343 pounds. Many harpooners became discouraged after only one trip when the catch for two weeks of fishing was no more than a dozen fish.

The sea scallop fishery continues to be of minor importance to Boston. Only nine scallop draggers made 48 trips and landed 261,009 pounds of scallops, compared with prewar years when anywhere from 125 to 150 trips landed over 1,500,000 pounds each year.

VALUES AND PRICES

Value of 1948 Landings High: In spite of the comparatively low production, the 1948 ex-vessel value of \$16,116,592.03 was the highest ever recorded at Boston. This was an increase of \$1,277,973.28 over the previous high of \$14,838,618.75 received in 1947. The offshore fleet received \$13,820,234.49 or 86 percent of this total value, and the inshore fleet \$2,296,357.54 or 14 percent (Table 3).

Table 3 - Values of Offshore and Inshore Landings at Boston Fish Pier, 1948

Species	Offshore		Inshore		T o t a l		
	Value	%	Value	%	Combined	Offshore	Inshore
					Value	%	%
Blackback	140,032.19	1	47,094.56	2	187,126.75	75	25
Cod, large ¹	1,114,067.78	8	205,249.79	9	1,319,317.57	84	16
Cod, market ²	1,186,354.44	9	150,132.51	7	1,336,486.95	89	11
Cusk	21,458.28	*	36,986.38	2	58,444.66	37	63
Dab	48,802.06	*	48,907.62	2	97,709.68	50	50
Gray sole	42,962.03	*	72,240.62	3	115,202.65	37	63
Haddock	5,369,889.52	39	419,688.36	18	5,789,577.88	93	7
Haddock, scrod	3,820,151.90	28	161,304.48	7	3,981,456.38	96	4
Hake ³	83,905.54	1	153,978.78	7	237,884.32	35	65
Halibut	51,892.85	*	3,288.40	*	55,181.25	94	6
Lemon sole	282,922.32	2	2,130.29	*	285,052.61	99	1
Mackerel ⁴	250,916.18	2	5,563.01	*	256,479.19	98	2
Pollock	606,408.54	4	186,126.58	8	792,535.12	77	23
Rosefish (Redfish) .	264,328.26	2	233,146.53	10	497,474.79	53	47
Swordfish	152,880.37	1	81.40	*	152,961.77	100	*
Whiting ²	-	-	499,062.10	22	499,062.10	-	100
Wolfish (Catfish) .	88,415.55	1	19,487.60	1	107,903.15	82	18
Yellowtail	174,539.26	1	42,437.37	2	216,976.63	80	20
Scallops, sea ⁵	116,583.61	1	-	-	116,583.61	100	-
Miscellaneous ⁶	3,723.81	*	9,451.16	*	13,174.97	28	72
Total	13,820,234.49	100	2,296,357.54	100	16,116,592.03	86	14

Footnotes same as Table 1, page 5.

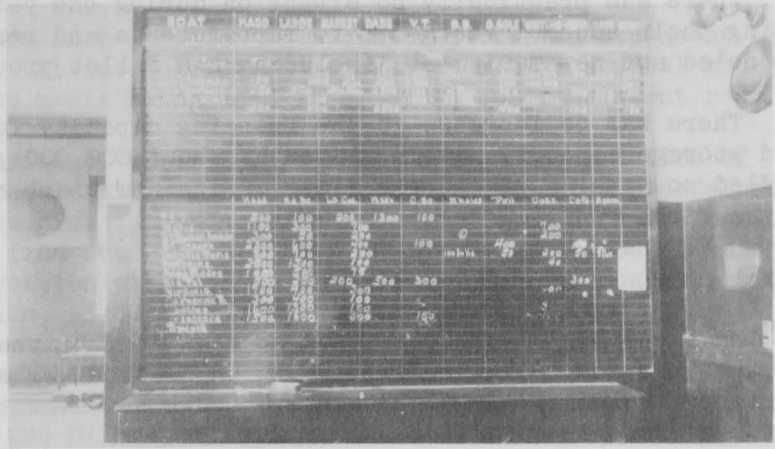
For all fish landed, the average price was \$8.08 per hundredweight--an increase of 11 percent over the 1947 average of \$7.37, but below the 1943 average of \$8.82 and the 1946 average of \$8.67.

All species brought higher average prices except for halibut, pollock, and rosefish. The largest increases were noted for wolffish, scrod haddock, gray sole, and mackerel, in that order.

Highest prices were received in January, the month of lowest production, and the average for the month was \$10.63. Lowest prices were received in June when the average was \$6.92 (Figure 1, see page 8). The price trend for 1948 followed the 1947 trend except that it was at a higher level.

DEMAND AND MARKET

Demand Generally Good--Market Steady: The 1948 demand at the Boston Fish Pier was generally good during most of the year. However, during the last two months the demand dropped sharply. Although there is usually a seasonal falling off in demand at the end of the year, it was particularly evident this year since production, due to exceptionally good weather, remained at a high level. The first dip in meat prices in over two years, and the reluctance of the fishery industry to follow suit, probably resulted in consumer resistance for fishery products at the prevailing prices.



BOARD IN THE AUCTION ROOM OF THE NEW ENGLAND FISH EXCHANGE ADMINISTRATION BUILDING, BOSTON FISH PIER. SHOWS THE HAILING FARE OF EACH INSHORE DRAGGER AND LINE TRAWLER DOCKED AT THE PIER.

The frozen fish market was affected considerably towards the end of the year by the slackened demand since this market depends on higher winter prices to compensate for the added cost of freezing and storage. Dealers who had frozen large quantities of fish during the summer were becoming alarmed as the year ended.

The market was steady, and even strong at times, except for the last two months of the year when it weakened considerably. Prices were good all year, and the average ex-vessel price was almost 3/4 cent per pound higher than in 1947.

Shippers' Market: The Shippers' Market supplied the Boston dealers with many fresh and frozen fish varieties not landed at the Fish Pier. These dealers provided the lobsters from Maine and Canada, halibut and salmon from the West Coast, shrimp from the South, smelt from Maine and Canada, and Middle Atlantic varieties, such as scup, butterfish, fluke, etc. They also supplemented the local production with scallops and flounders from New Bedford, swordfish from Canada, Japan, and South American, and mackerel from various points. At one time, this market was almost entirely a straight commission business. Now most items are bought. This market enjoyed a good demand for most varieties in 1948, although there were periods when some frozen items moved quite slowly. In general, the market was steady.

PROCESSING

It is estimated that 90 percent of the fish landed at Boston is cut into fillets, and that 90 percent of the fillets are frozen. In recent years, the fresh fillet trade has dwindled to an unimportant position. This is easily understandable due to the greater durability of the frozen product which allows for wider and more distant markets. Also, improved methods of freezing have brought about an improved product.

Some advancement was made in the field of packaging during the year. Most important was the increase in the use of the one-pound package. This size package allows for additional retail outlets and has good consumer appeal, but it has its problems. Fillets must be trimmed or cut to size, involving waste and added labor cost. Until recently, only one dealer had ventured into this field, using one-pound slices or chunks. This idea was expanded to most varieties landed at Boston, and toward the end of 1948, many others were putting up one-pound packages.

There was practically no expansion during the year, most wholesalers confining their added investments to improvements and renovations. Some plants were remodeled and new equipment, including new fillet production lines, were installed.

There was no increase in the freezing capacity for fishery products at Boston. Cold storage capacity was increased by about 500,000 pounds when one firm (formerly handled no fish) assigned one floor of its new plant exclusively for the holding of frozen fish.

LABOR

No Labor Disputes: There was no time lost on vessels or in shore plants during the year due to labor disputes. The Seafood Workers' Union did gain some advantages, including wage increases, through settlement of disagreements before State and Federal conciliators.

TRANSPORTATION

Out-of-State Shipments Delayed for Short Period: The transportation of fish from Boston to out-of-State consignees was hampered somewhat for a few days beginning January 1, 1948, due to a labor dispute between management and the local truck drivers' union. Later, the truck drivers' union agreed to move all food while the dispute was in progress. There was no tie-up of shipments within the State, but movement of out-of-State shipments to railheads were delayed due to limited facilities available.

IMPORTS

Imports of Fillets Increase: Fishery leaders in Boston have become alarmed over the importation of groundfish fillets as the Boston market is affected considerably by these imports. These leaders joined together with other groups from various sections of New England and the country in petitioning Congress to enact some legislation limiting these imports. United States imports of groundfish (including rosefish) fillets during 1948 amounted to 53,566,452 pounds, an increase of 54 percent over the 1947 total of 35,093,435 pounds, and 443 percent over the 1941 total of 9,931,030 pounds. Most of these imports came from Canada, Newfoundland, and Iceland.