

# Extracts from Reports of the Commissioners of Irish Fisheries in Bantry Bay

Compiled by Frank O'Donovan

**From the eight report of the Commissioners of the Irish Fisheries 1827 we read:**

An Account of the number of Decked and Half-decked VESSELS, together with Undecked and Open Boats of every description, registered and employed in the Fisheries, with their Tonnage and Number of Men, in the Year ended, 5 April 1827.

Station: *Bantry*

Decked Vessels			Half-decked Vessels			Open Sail Boats		Row Boats		Total Men
No.	Tonnage	Men	No.	Tonnage	Men	No.	Men	No.	Men	
6	137	36	3	51	15	55	275	619	3,195	3,521

**Royal Commission of inquiry into the state of the Irish Fisheries: first report 1837:**

*Bantry, Co. Cork* – Total number of boats repaired or supplied with fishery materials in this district, was 169, at an average cost of £2 7s. 2d. for each boat repaired or supplied. The total cost is £399 0s. 8d.

**Report of the Commissioners of Fisheries Ireland for 1853:**

*“District of Bantry* – John Meara, Clerk of Conservators – The fisheries progressing favourably; the prospect much better; the take of fish much larger; 6½d. per pound; all purchased for exportation; the protection much the same; the quantity of breeding fish greater; the fry more numerous.”

**The Appendix to the Report of the Commissioners of Fisheries Ireland for 1857** includes a letter from a magistrate dated 12<sup>th</sup> February 1858:

“You are aware I reside in the peninsula of Mintervary, which is bounded on the south by Dunmanus bay, and on the north by the bay of Bantry. The appalling effects of the famine pressed with peculiar severity on this district, from the very dense population, and consequent smallness of the holdings. The hake fishery was of great importance, and gave considerable employment. It was carried on chiefly by the ‘small holders’; generally two, and sometimes four, joined to set up a boat and trammels. The boats were generally badly made, the average size was from sixteen to nineteen feet keel; the cost of the boat about five to seven pounds, and the trammels and other gear suitable to boats of that size, varied from three to five

pounds, so the craft was set up on very moderate terms, and I have known boats of this description, in good seasons, take from £20 to £30 worth of fish. The crew of each boat seldom or never exceeded four, and as this fishing does not interfere with their agricultural occupations, the trammels being usually set in the evening, and, when the weather permitted, drawn early the following day, the profit derived from this fishery, in general, paid the rent and taxes of their small holdings, leaving the produce of the land, with some surplus fish, for their own sustenance. This was all well while the ‘potato grew’; but when the deadly blow came (1847), all was ruin and destruction. The best fishermen emigrated or died; and from 1847 to 1854, the fishery was totally neglected, the boats were left to rot upon the strands. In 1855, some reaction took place, the hake fishery began to revive; and as there was quick sale and a good price for the fish, it is now progressing rapidly. Though this has been termed a bad season, yet a considerable quantity of hake has been taken, chiefly in Bantry Bay. They are sold by what is termed a ‘hundered’, which consists of six score and three couple extra for what is called ‘cast’, making 126 hake. The price varies according to quality, from 28s. to 35s. per hundred. None are exported; they find a ready sale at the neighbouring fairs, being purchased by those residing in the interior of the country. The boats, with slight repairs, hold a long time, but the trammels are generally worn out in one season. Trawling was tried last year by Lord B., in Dunmanus. He bought a large hooker, with the best gear, and employed the most experienced fishermen; but it proved a complete failure. An Englishman purchased this hooker and gear, and tried them in Bantry Bay. He was somewhat more successful, and caught a number of very fine soles and plaice. Scallops abound in Dunmanus Bay; numbers have been taken this season, giving employment to three or four boats and twelve or fourteen men; but they can only be taken in very calm weather. A considerable quantity of herrings was taken this season by Messrs. Curtayne and Henegan of Bantry. Though of small size they met a ready sale. They were taken by seines; but the net fishers who generally, about Christmas, took a number of large size herrings about Gearees and Glenlough, Bantry Bay side, this season were totally disappointed. Great shoals of sprat sometimes visit Dunmanus Bay, but I understand there is but one seine in the entire harbour. I consider the hake fishery to be the staple one in the two bays I have mentioned; it affords employment without at all impeding the cultivation of the land, and the hake is the most punctual visitant to our shores. Haddock and cod are sometimes caught by ‘long lines’, but those require large craft, and are attended with considerable expense. This mode of fishing in this district is now nearly neglected.”

**Deep Sea and Coast Fishery Commissioners (Ireland) report, 1867**

State of the Registry of Fishing Vessels on the Coast of Ireland to 1<sup>st</sup> January 1868

Name of District: Bantry

Boundaries: From Three Castle Head to Shot Head

Registering Officer: Robert G. Gibbon

	<b>Vessels</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Boys</b>
First Class employed in 1866	5	20	0
Second Class employed in 1866	214	856	0
<b>Total employed in 1866</b>	<b>219</b>	<b>876</b>	<b>0</b>
First Class employed in 1867	4	16	4
Second Class employed in 1867	204	700	100
<b>Total employed in 1867</b>	<b>208</b>	<b>716</b>	<b>104</b>