

Fishing for Trouble

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THE purpose of deep-sea fishing is not solely to earn profits for the trawler owners. It is mainly to catch fish for human consumption. British housewives want plentiful fish at the cheapest possible prices.

Let no-one think that I do not respect the sterling qualities of all those who choose to earn their living by going to sea to catch fish, a marvellously more satisfying life, incidentally, than most. But let's not be bamboozled by sentimentality. Are British fishermen in particular more magnificent than Icelandic or any other fishermen? I am fairly certain that they would never claim so for themselves. All trawlermen have to face similar hazards. All are equally magnificent.

When it comes to considering the question of Naval protection for the trawlers belonging to the trawler owners' monopoly, perhaps the Government, which has invested so much of the taxpayers' money in subsidising the building of trawlers for the benefit of the trawler owners and no-one else, thinks they should now spend more taxpayers' money in protecting the profits that accrue to their friends

the trawler owners. The public do not stand to gain anything from the deal, except public humiliation if and when the Royal Navy fails in its task.

The trawler owners now say that they propose to boycott the importation of Icelandic cod fillets pending the outcome of the dispute. By what right do the trawler owners decide for us what shall or shall not be imported? They are not the Government. But if one follows the course of the Icelandic dispute since the war, one sees how bit by bit they have succeeded



in excluding the Icelanders from our ports and thereby made enemies of our former friends.

During World War II Iceland provided us with practically all our fish and we were her only customer. Without her help we could not have survived. By 1948 we were still taking 51.1 per cent of her exports. By 1950 this had been reduced to 14 per cent and in 1971 we took less than nine per cent. In the meantime Iceland has had to find other markets. In 1971 she sold 42.5 per cent of her fish to the USA and eight per cent to Russia.

Iceland is now more friendly with Russia than with Britain. We must hope that the Royal Navy will not be met by Russian submarines if they enter Icelandic waters in defence of the trawler-owners' profits. Successive Governments, through their myopic protectionist policies, have been grievously at fault in turning a loyal ally into a potential enemy.

What the Government should do now is clear.

First they should stop subsidising the trawler owners with the taxpayers' money. Secondly, they should break up the stranglehold of the trawler owners' monopoly by ensuring, in the interests of the people as a whole, free entry to our ports of foreign-owned trawlers, particularly those of our former friends from Iceland.