

SESS. II.—1891.
NEW ZEALAND.

GREY VALLEY COAL-MINES COMMISSION

(MEMORANDA RELATIVE TO REPORT OF).

Laid on the Table by the Hon. R. J. Seddon, with the Leave of the House.

No. 1.

Mr. J. P. MAXWELL, M.I.C.E., to the Hon. the MINISTER for PUBLIC WORKS.

New Zealand Government Railways, Head Office,
Wellington, 6th January, 1891.

Report of the Commission on the Coal-workings at Brunnerton and Wallsend.

SIR,—

I have the honour to request permission to lay before you some remarks on this report with respect to the question of arrangements for the storage and shipping of coal at Greymouth.

The Commission does not appear to have been made acquainted with the history of this subject, as none of the witnesses examined could be entirely acquainted with it, and the question is treated as one on which the railway authorities are divided in opinion, and which as yet remains to be investigated and dealt with, while it really is one which has in past years received the closest consideration from the Government prior to the appointment of the Railway Commissioners; and, after the fullest investigation by the Railway Department, and the consideration of the views of the mine-owners and the then Harbour Board, the present arrangements were adopted as a final solution of the question. A large sum was spent to give effect to the decision of the Government—in erecting hydraulic cranes, extending the wharf, providing the necessary sidings, and converting the whole of the coal-wagon stock. The work, which was begun by the Government, was only finally completed last year.

I understand from the Chief Commissioner of Railways that the Commission was not desirous of hearing my evidence. Having been responsible for some eight years for advising the Government on the subject of the railway arrangements, I now ask the favour of being allowed to place on record the reasons which led to the adoption of the plans now in operation.

The coal was formerly delivered in shoots from the trucks to the ships from as low a level as possible. The coal-mine proprietors strongly objected to this, alleging that it damaged the coal. They repeatedly pressed the Government to unload by cranes, and in these demands they were strongly backed up by the then Harbour Board.

The coal-mine owners claimed that great economy would be effected by cranes, by saving the waste occasioned by breakage in shooting the coal. The Railway Department sent an officer to New South Wales to study the systems in use there; and, after careful consideration, the Government acquiesced in the demands of the coal-mine owners and the Harbour Board, and hydraulic cranes were adopted.

The Railway Department has always consistently declined to undertake the storage of coal, either at the port or anywhere else. The interruptions in working the mines are liable to occur not only from the state of the river, but from the irregular supply of vessels for sea-transport, or from unsuitable arrangements at the mines. If the railways assumed the responsibility of finding storage they would become entangled in disputes regarding the shipping arrangements, and labour-questions at the mines, which would be quite beyond their proper sphere. The Railway Department has always held, and has repeatedly pointed out, that the proper place for storage is at the mines, where the coal can be delivered into bins from the mine-trucks, and be screened thence during loading into the railway-trucks without additional handling or breakage.

The rapid transport from the mines to the ship can be readily performed by the railway at a moderate additional expense, at a speed far beyond any demand likely to arise for many years to come.

The Commission has fallen into a grave error in supposing that the railways provide free storage for coal in trucks. The railways have always declined to do this, on account of the extravagant cost of such a system. The numbers of trucks provided originally were barely sufficient for the mines then worked by the different owners. Each mine would require as a minimum three sets of trucks, one at the mine, one at the ship, and a third in transit, and an additional number for repairs.