

OUR TELEGRAPH CABLES.

A new cable across Cook Strait, from Oterangi Bay to White's Bay, thirty-one knots in length, was laid on the 7th May last by the "Terranora." This cable was ordered last year in anticipation of the breakdown of the old three-core, originally laid in 1866.

On the 29th April, a few days before laying the new cable, this old one parted in several places. With the new single conductor, operated by the Wheatstone automatic instruments which have been introduced since my last Statement, it has been practicable to cope with the telegraph traffic between the North and South Islands, notwithstanding the loss of the three-core cable, which has been abandoned.

Another single-core cable has been ordered from England, and is expected here in time to be laid in December.

The Wanganui to Wakapuaka cable has been permanently duplexed, materially assisting in overtaking the telegraph work between the two Islands, as well as that between the North Island and Australia.

It is deserving of note that the cost of the cable-steamer "Terranora," including the expenses of purchase of new cables and repairing of old cables, amounts at the present time to £8,253; but had the Government adopted during the last year the former system of employing a steamer from outside the colony to do the work which the "Terranora" has done the actual cost would have been £16,000, so that by utilising the "Terranora" the Government has not only saved the cost of the new cables that have been laid, but also the cost of the steamer itself. Then, in addition to this, there was £8,000 to the good over and above what the expenditure would have been. This is extremely satisfactory. It is not desirable, however, that the "Terranora" should be used longer than is absolutely necessary for the work connected with the maintenance of our cables. Though the "Terranora" has during the last three years done excellent work, the time has now arrived when she should be replaced by a new steamer.

POST AND TELEGRAPH CONFERENCE.

The Conference met at Hobart in February last, and was attended by Ministerial representatives from all the colonies. The meeting was to have taken place in Melbourne, but, at my instance, the other colonies agreed to meet at Hobart, and on a date earlier than that originally fixed, in order that I might, on my way to London, be able to attend—a consideration for my convenience of which I cannot sufficiently express my appreciation.

As my arrangements necessitated my early departure from Hobart, I was unable to remain throughout the meeting; but the colony's interests were well looked after by the Postmaster-General of Tasmania, who was good enough to consent to act for me in my absence.

The principal business transacted at the Conference affecting New Zealand was that relating to ocean-mail and telegraph-cable services.

The Conference, on a motion submitted by me, reaffirmed the desirableness of establishing a four-weekly mail-service between Australia, New Zealand, and Vancouver, alternating with the present San Francisco mail-steamers, so as to provide a fortnightly Pacific service. This question is treated of at greater length in another part of the Statement.

The threatened withdrawal of Victoria, now one of the guarantors of any deficiency in the working of the Eastern and New Zealand-Sydney telegraph cables, brought the whole question of cable communication and cable guarantees very prominently before the Conference. Besides reaffirming the desirableness of the construction of the Pacific cable, it is gratifying to be able to state that the Conference adopted another motion of mine, under which the amounts hitherto guaranteed by the colonies in respect to the New Zealand-Sydney and Eastern cables were materially reduced, thereby effecting a considerable annual saving to this colony. Not only did the motion secure the continued adhesion of Victoria to the cable-guarantee agreements, but the reduction of the colonies' liabilities was obtained without increasing the Press rates over the New Zealand-Sydney cable, which at one time seemed inevitable.