In the early days of the war shipbuilding in its infancy was under the direction of the Hon. Minister of Marine, but it was soon apparent, as the industry was dependent on the supply of materials such as steel, that the Hon. Minister of Supply and Munitions was the appropriate authority, and this war industry was placed under that Minister, the Hon. D. G. Sullivan.

Mr. Sullivan, with executives of the engineering industry, proceeded to Australia, procuring plans of suitable vessels and a supply of steel frames.

The Minister was responsible for the whole of the programme thereafter and worked in close consultation with War Cabinet to ensure expedition of the work.

In this connection, also, the Department received the fullest co-operation from Navy Office through Captain Bodell and Commander Earnshaw, through the Supply Department with Mr. G. H. Jackson as Director of Production, and through the Munitions Controllers, Squadron Leader Carter and Mr. W. G. Colquhoun.

For the purpose of this report the shipbuilding programme will be divided into two distinct parts, the programme for New Zealand and that for the Americans.

New Zealand Programme

Soon after the commencement of the war in 1939 it was apparent that, despite the taking-up by Navy of most of the small cargo-vessels suitable for transforming into minesweepers, there was still a dearth of sufficient minesweeping craft to fully equip New Zealand for the war emergency. Later events proved the wisdom of our policy at this time.

The major factor, however, was that minesweepers were required immediately, and ways and means had to be found for providing these at the shortest possible notice.

Government set up a small Shipbuilding Committee with Mr. G. E. Breeze as Chairman, and associated with him were Mr. F. P. Walsh, President, Seamen's Union; Mr. G. H. Jackson, later Director of Production; Mr. G. A. Pascoe, Factory Controller; a Navy representative; Squadron Leader Carter, Munitions Controller; and Mr. W. C. Smith as administrative officer.

It was thought that vessels of the minesweeper-trawler class could be constructed of composite design, but the bottleneck occurred in connection with engines, which, although they could be, and were eventually, built in New Zealand, could not be constructed in a short space of time. Inspection was then made of five old condemned vessels, which were lying in the "Rotten Row" of Auckland, the property of the Northern Steam Ship Co., Ltd. It was ascertained that the engines of these vessels still had life in them, and after mature consideration it was agreed that composite hulls could be built and minesweepers engined with the engines from the condemned steamers. It was assumed that the old engines might have a five-year life, which, to all intents and purposes at that time, covered what was thought would be the duration of the war.

Let me mention here that those three composite minesweepers were employed right up to the end of the war on their respective stations and still have sufficient life in them to permit, if need be, of their transformation as trawlers. For incorporation in the minesweepers certain minor alterations had to be made in the engines and boilers.

By this time plans and specifications of "Castle" type trawlers had been received from Admiralty. In at least one case the boilers had to be placed back to front to permit of their inclusion, and the general arrangement of the vessels, having regard to the difficulties of installing old engines in new hulls, was a feat of engineering of which the Survey Branch of the Marine Department will continue to be proud.

Eventually these three minesweepers, the "Rimu," the "Hinau," and the "Manuka," were successfully constructed and launched. The major firms occupied on this work were Shipbuilders Ltd., Seagar Bros., Mason Bros. Engineering Co., Ltd., and Senior Foundry, Ltd. They were constructed on hastily improvised slipways at Auckland on foreshore sections kindly made available by the Devonport Steam Ferry Co., Ltd., and the Northern Steam Ship Co., Ltd.