

STATE COAL-MINES.

The preliminary works for the opening-up of the State collieries are being vigorously prosecuted both at Seddonville, near Westport, and at Point Elizabeth, near Greymouth. At the former place the main tunnel and surface haulage-road, together with an additional siding and necessary repairs to some of the plant formerly owned by the late Westport-Cardiff Coal Company (Limited), are approaching completion, and the work of opening-up in the coal will, it is anticipated, enable a supply (although small at first) to be forthcoming from the Seddonville Colliery probably within the next two months.

At Point Elizabeth Colliery the necessary tunnels are being driven to win the coal in different sections of the property, and the main seam, 16 ft. in thickness, has already been reached in No. 1 tunnel. The construction of haulage-roads, loading-bins, and other requirements are in progress. The railway to connect the colliery with the Port of Greymouth was partially constructed by the late lessees of the coal properties, and on the cancellation of the lease was purchased by the Government. It is now being completed under the charge of the Public Works Department. Further details as to these works will be found in the reports of the Manager of the State coal-mines.

ACCIDENTS IN MINES.

Sixteen fatalities occurred in connection with the various branches of mining-work conducted throughout New Zealand during the year ended the 31st December last, and are summarised as follows :—

Class of Mining.	Number of Persons employed.	Fatalities.	Rate per 1,000.
Gold-mining—			
Quartz-mines	3,807	2	0·51
Hydraulic and alluvial mines	7,591	3	1·58
Dredges	9	9	
Coal-mines	2,885	2	0·69
	14,283	16	1·12

In all cases these accidents were inquired into by the Department. It is found that by far the greater proportion of fatal accidents at dredges is in connection with boating and the oiling of machinery while in motion, being mainly the result of carelessness on the part of the men. Apart from this, the figures show that mining, and underground mining especially, is conducted on safe and careful lines, and presents a lower death-rate than many trades carried on in broad daylight, where the risks are generally admitted to be infinitely less. It is evident that great care is exercised by the management of mines. At the same time, it must not be forgotten that underground work has special dangers and risks, and that, owing to the ever-changing conditions which prevail in mining, accidents are liable to occur in even the best-regulated mines.

SULPHUR.

The exports of sulphur have fallen off during the past two years. For the year 1902 the returns show an export of only 100 tons, valued at £475.

KAURI-GUM.

The output of kauri-gum appears to be steadily diminishing in quantity but increasing considerably in value. The export returns for last year show 7,430 tons, valued at £450,223, as compared with an export of 7,541 tons, valued at £446,114, for the year 1901.

There appears some probability that the peaty and swampy ground of old kauri forests will be treated for the extraction of the gum and its constituent oils, with which the ground is more or less permeated.