

SIR,—

Department of Industries and Commerce, Wellington, 30th June, 1904.

I have the honour to submit herewith the Departmental report for the year ended 31st March, 1904.

G. S. MUNRO, Acting-Secretary.

The Hon. Sir J. G. Ward, K.C.M.G., Minister of Industries and Commerce, Wellington.

MARKET REPORTS.

The Department aims at placing at the disposal of producers and traders reliable periodical reports on the demand and current prices for New Zealand produce in all the principal markets. These reports are received regularly from the South African and London officials of the Department, and are immediately communicated to the public through the medium of the Press.

Special reports on any particular line of produce are obtained at the request of any one interested, either by post or cablegram, if by the latter means payment of the cost incurred is required; and, in the case of foreign markets, where there is no resident representative of the Government, all commercial information relative to any line of produce is obtained through the medium of the Commercial Intelligence Branch of the British Board of Trade.

At the request of the Agent-General, the full particulars of each shipment of frozen meat, dairy-produce, and hemp are cabled immediately each steamer sails, or as soon after as possible. These particulars are recorded for public information in the London office, where any one interested can ascertain exactly the quantities of New Zealand produce which are on the water in transit to the United Kingdom. I understand that reliable information of this nature is very much appreciated by purchasers of our produce in the United Kingdom, and enables them to operate with confidence, as they know the information supplied is absolutely reliable, and free from any taint of interest.

SUBSIDISED STEAM SERVICE TO SOUTH AFRICA.

This service has been satisfactorily carried out during the past twelve months. During July last, owing to the heavy demands for space for shipment of oats to South Africa the contractors were forced to put on an extra steamer to relieve the contract steamer. This steamer, the "Cooeyanna," loaded almost entirely with oats and live sheep. Since then the tonnage placed at the disposal of shippers by the contractors has been in excess of their requirements.

I attach a schedule showing the sailing and arrival dates of each steamer, the average duration of passages, and the quantities of the principal lines of cargo carried:—

Name of Steamer.	Date of Sailing.	Date of Arrival in South Africa.
Norfolk	30 April, 1903 ...	13 June, 1903.
Essex	14 June, " ...	Voyage abandoned owing to accident.
Cornwall	30 June, " ...	11 August, 1903.
Cooeyanna	14 July, " ...	Not a contract steamer.
Essex	28 August, " ...	3 October, 1903.
Suffolk	10 September, " ...	24 October, "
Dorset	29 September, " ...	19 November, "
Somerset	24 October, " ...	22 December, "
Ripplingham Grange	2 December, " ...	15 January, 1904.
Fifeshire	11 January, 1904 ...	23 February, "
Everton Grange	12 January, " ...	Not a contract steamer.
Norfolk	19 February, " ...	6 April, 1904.
Surrey	6 March, " ...	14 April, "
Devon	1 April, " ...	10 May, "

Average passage from New Zealand to South Africa *via* Fremantle, including all stoppages: 44 days.

Total shipments by steamers of the service for the year ending 31st March are as follows: 249,995 carcasses mutton, 7,508 quarters beef, 6,452 carcasses lamb, 275,043 sacks oats, 27,409 boxes butter, 2,350 crates poultry, 21,112 sacks bran, 6,265 sides pork, 1,294 sacks pumice, 177 cans canned fish, 855 sacks barley, 24 horses, 75 head of cattle, 147,926 superficial feet timber, 1,836 sacks peas, 575 sacks grass-seed, 7,569 sacks wheat, 62 sacks beans, 300 sacks wheatmeal, 710 cases boned beef, 1,708 crates frozen fish, 2,398 cases potatoes, 15,369 live sheep, 587 crates cheese, 234 sacks pollard, 1,930 cans pressed meats, 75 crates rabbits, and 1,529 packages of sundries.

Shipments to Fremantle were as follows: 15,290 carcasses mutton, 2,122 sacks oats, 889 sacks bran, 1,600 carcasses lamb, 70 crates frozen fish, 74,326 superficial feet timber, 30 cases cheese, and 50 cases pressed meats.

It will be noticed that a considerable quantity of frozen mutton has been shipped to Fremantle by the subsidised steam service, but unfortunately the quantity of general cargo is limited owing to the operations of the shipping ring which controls the coastal trade of the Commonwealth. This subject was referred to in my last annual report, and the position remains the same, except that the restrictions mentioned do not apply to shipments of refrigerated cargo.

A steady volume of trade with South African ports has been maintained during the past year, carried on by the subsidised steam service. Owing to the serious depression which is general throughout South Africa the trade has been restricted chiefly through the tightness of the money