

It is rather surprising that there should be so many breaches for failing to close in terms of requisitions, seeing that the hours are fixed by a majority of the shopkeepers themselves. No doubt the minority feel somewhat aggrieved at having to fall into line with the wishes of the majority of shopkeepers; but it has not been the Department's experience that these are the offending parties in breaking the terms of the gazetted notices. Some of the notices received for closing under section 25 show that the shopkeepers interested have just been able to secure a majority; and in such cases a good deal of feeling has been evinced by the parties for and against the fixing of closing-hours, but it is pleasing to say that, after the first few weeks of the notices becoming operative, there is little or no further trouble in this connection. Great care is exercised by the Department to see that the majority of the shopkeepers signing the requisitions are entitled to do so, although the onus of certifying to this falls upon the civic authority concerned. In doubtful cases I have directed the local Inspector to make full inquiries, and, when found necessary, the matter is referred back to the civic authority. During the year I circularised the various local authorities as to the provisions of section 25, and enclosed a sample requisition notice to be used in case it was required. A great deal of correspondence was entailed upon the Department through the majority of notices received having to be returned for correction or for addition to the certificate of the local authority. The sample form sent out has resulted not only in saving the time of the Department, but in expediting the gazetting of the notice.

Before prosecuting for breaches of the Act, in a very large majority of the cases repeated warnings are given to offending shopkeepers. Generally it is only when the law is flagrantly flouted that the Court's judgment is invoked.

A full list of the requisitions in force is included in this report. For the present year 55 notices were gazetted, as against 39 last year.

The detailed statistics of shops, giving the number of shops and employees, will be found in another page of this report.

#### SHEARERS' ACCOMMODATION ACT.

Considerable improvements have been effected in the accommodation provided for shearers this season as compared with former years, and I have to remark very favourably on the prompt attention generally given by stationholders to the requirements of our Inspectors. The number of stations where it has been found necessary to order improvements is much smaller in proportion to the whole than at the last inspection. In the majority of cases where additional buildings or internal alterations of a more or less extensive nature were ordered last year, the notices have been fully complied with, the result being a decidedly more satisfactory state of things than ever existed before. In a number of instances extra time had to be given owing to bad roads, difficulty in obtaining timber, &c.

During the season 1907-8, when a very general inspection was made, 1,133 sheds were visited, and 749 were reported upon as being satisfactory. In 93 cases no accommodation whatever was provided, and in 169 instances extensive alterations were considered necessary. A further inspection of the sheds classed as unsatisfactory was made during the 1908-9 season, and a return in this report gives a list of the localities visited and a summary of the conditions obtaining. Considerable difficulty is, of course, experienced in carrying out the Act in the more remote districts; but, notwithstanding this, as I have stated, very great improvements have been made in the accommodation provided for shearers throughout New Zealand generally.

In response to requests, we publish in this report a plan of accommodation considered to be suitable for the purposes of shearers' accommodation. The plan can be modified or extended to suit particular needs.

There have been several prosecutions instituted in which the presiding Magistrates have given orders for the accommodation required by the Department to be provided, with costs against the defendants. There was one exception, however; this was a case in the Wanganui district, where the proprietor was charged with failing to provide suitable accommodation for his shearers. The case was heard at Wanganui, and dismissed, the Magistrate deciding that the loft over a stable, where the men were accommodated, was not "unsuitable accommodation" within the meaning of the Act. There is no provision in the Act for appeal against a Magistrate's decision, but further steps are being taken by the Department, to see whether more satisfactory accommodation can be arranged for next season.

In one instance, at Gisborne, the Magistrate adjourned the case in order to give defendant time to make satisfactory provision. This was in due course done to the satisfaction of the Inspector, and the case withdrawn.

Another sheepowner was proceeded against for failure to comply with notice served on him by the Inspector. Sleeping-accommodation to the satisfaction of the local Inspector was ordered by the Magistrate, to be completed within thirty days.

In another case, heard at Mangaweka, the defendant had been ordered to erect new sleeping and dining accommodation, and, having failed to do so, was convicted, with costs, and ordered to comply with the requisition by the 31st July next.