

lizards showing signs of an increase. By arrangement with the Marine Department steps are being taken to protect the remaining bush on Stephen Island, and to sow seeds of various native trees on certain selected areas from which the bush has disappeared.

Very few cats now remain, but it will be necessary to wage continuous war on the hawks which come to the island every summer. The keepers on Cuvier Island are killing off the goats, which are causing damage to the vegetation.

(4.) *Fire Brigades Act.*

Fire Districts.—Two new districts were constituted during the year.

Inspection of Fire Brigades.—The Inspector had a very busy time during the year. In addition to his usual brigade inspection he has had a great amount of work as Government Fire Inspector, and many calls have been made upon him by the Defence Department for expert advice. His report up to the end of the Fire Board's year, 30th June, is contained in a separate parliamentary paper.

(5.) *Motor Regulation Act.*

Ten local authorities adopted Part II of the Act during the year.

Letters and numerals as identification-marks were allotted to twenty-four registering authorities.

Some little confusion still exists respecting the function of the Minister under section 4 of the Act. Registering authorities frequently forward proposed motor by-laws for some indication as to what the Minister is likely to take exception. Others, again, forward by-laws when made asking that they may be approved. The Minister has no approving function, his power being one of disallowance at any time after the receipt of the by-laws in this office. A by-law may be reasonable enough when made, but in the course of time it may become unreasonable. Thus the Minister cannot be expected to signify to a registering authority whether a new motor by-law, in which there is nothing for the time being to which objection need be taken, will or will not be disallowed at some time in the future.

Two questions for which legislation is being urged are motor speed-limits and the licensing of drivers of motor-cars. Local bodies generally desire power to fix definite limits, but the experience of other countries is in favour of the existing law, whereby (section 9 (1) of the Motor Regulation Act, 1908) every person commits an offence who drives a motor on a public highway recklessly or negligently, or at a speed or in a manner which is dangerous to the public, having regard to all the circumstances of the case, including the nature, condition, and use of the highway, and the amount of traffic which actually is at the time, or which might reasonably be expected to be, on the highway. The true remedy for the furious and reckless driving so prevalent to-day is a stricter administration of the law as it stands.

The second question, however—the licensing of drivers and the issuing of proficiency certificates—is one that should be made the subject of legislation as soon as possible. This you have approved, but a suitable opportunity to bring down a new Motor Bill has not offered. The necessity for obtaining a certificate of competency will undoubtedly lead to a higher standard of driving, and the probability of their licenses being cancelled on conviction for an offence against the Act will restrain many reckless drivers.

The decision of the Court of Appeal in the case of *Geraghty v. Porter*, that clause 4 of the General Motor Regulations was *ultra vires*, made it necessary to issue a fresh regulation prescribing the manner in which the registered number shall be affixed to motors. The Department is indebted to the New Zealand Automobile Union for valuable suggestions regarding this and other matters.

(6.) *Inspection of Weights and Measures.*

In July of 1917 a conference of the four principal Inspectors—those stationed at Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch, and Dunedin—was held at Wellington. As a result of this the Dominion has been divided into four centre districts—Auckland, Wellington, Canterbury, and Otago—and the principal Inspectors have been charged with special duties—*e.g.*, the periodic inspection of local districts, instruction of new local Inspectors, &c. Already this has had a beneficial effect, particularly in standardizing the methods of inspection and ensuring that no new Inspector shall begin his work until thoroughly conversant with his duties and proficient in the testing of the great variety of weighing-machines now in use. For the first time, too, as a result of the centre Inspectors visiting outlying districts, the Department has become possessed of fairly accurate information respecting the number and capacity of weighbridges in use throughout the Dominion.

Another important step has been the standardization of Inspectors' equipment.

Many complaints were received during the year that dealers were in the habit of selling coal and coke by the bag instead of by weight. Section 24 of the Weights and Measures Act, 1908, provides, *inter alia*, that charcoal, coke, and coal of any description shall be sold by weight and not by measure, but that nothing shall prevent its sale in any vessel that is not represented as containing any amount of standard weight or measure. This, while authorizing the sale of a bucket, or basket, or truck of coal as such, but not as representing a certain weight, does not authorize the sale of coal by the bag, since a bag is not a "vessel" within the meaning of the Act. The attention of dealers in towns where sale by the bag has been the custom has been drawn to the requirements of the Act.

Complaints have also been made of short weight of coal and food commodities. This matter is not one that can be dealt with under the present Weights and Measures Act. The need for power to regulate the sale of coal is urgent.

Another peculiar and vital fault in our Act is that while the Governor-General in Council may make regulations prescribing the material of which weights and measures may be made, there is no power to prescribe the materials of which scales may be made. It is most essential that any new Weights and Measures Act should provide this power, and, in addition, power to reject any particular class of scale as being unsuitable for counter use.