

APPENDICES.

APPENDIX A.

EVIDENCE GIVEN BY CHARLES NORTON BOULT, ENGINEER TO THE WESTPORT HARBOUR BOARD, IN CONNECTION WITH THE COAL-MINING INDUSTRY.

Mr. McDonald : I would like you to explain to us the relationship between the harbour and the general coal question and the general trade of the district.

Mr. Boulton : It is quite obvious that all the coal that is produced or that will be produced in this district must go through this harbour. There is no possibility of any other outlet that could possibly compete with water carriage, whereas it is possible that Grey coal might be railed here and sent from here by sea. This harbour is limited, first of all, by its bar. The harbour is naturally developed by means of training-walls to a depth of some 12½ ft. of water at low water, ordinary spring tides, but it has to be further developed by means of dredging to a workable-depth for our coal-boats to come in and out. In 1918 on over two hundred days of the year we had a working-depth of from 17 ft. to 18 ft. at low water, and to that may be added from 5½ ft. to 9½ ft. rise—that is, neaps and spring-tide rise. The bar is continuous and keeps forming; it is formed partly by the westerly sand-drift which is making up the coast all the time, and partly by the detritus that comes down the river. At the present time the harbour has a first-class suction dredge on the bar, and that is holding the water at the depth I have indicated; but the banks of the Buller River being soft and low, the river washes down enormous quantities of gravel from erosion, and the Board has at present only one very obsolete bucket dredger, which is about forty years old and about done, to cope with the banks forming here, which finally reach the entrance, and we should really be dredging the river for about seven or eight miles up. Instead of that, there is a series of gravel-banks forming from right down at the lower end of our berthage area up to the Nine-mile. As soon as you begin to disturb these banks you get a constant flow of detritus down the river. We have tried to dredge out a local area, and each time it is filled up almost at once. To open this bar is a question of dredging very large quantities of material. So far we have dredged about an average of 100,000 cubic yards a year. At present we have only got a plant which is on its last legs, and it would take some two or three years to get a suitable plant; and unless we get a plant not only will the river not be fit to cope with the increased trade, but it will go considerably back from what it is at present, and I anticipate that there will be considerable difficulty in handling boats in this port unless a bucket plant is obtained. Further development on the bar would necessitate a larger and more powerful suction dredger out there. I cannot sound too strongly the note of warning about the condition this port will be in in a few years. You will not only be no better off, but you will be worse off.

Dr. Hight : What expenses will be involved?—We have one suction dredger here which is suitable for a hopper. My idea is that you cannot use the type of bucket dredger which is in use in New Zealand. The idea is to have hoppers which steam up to the dredge and take away a load. I have one suction dredge which would be suitable for a hopper. I would require to buy a large bucket dredger with a capacity of about 1,000 tons an hour, and another hopper. Two hoppers would do us amply here. A dredge of the size indicated and one hopper would have cost before the war not more than £72,000. What it would cost to-day I am not prepared to say. Without interest their running-costs would be something like £9,000 a year. Such a plant could, I suppose, in four years develop this harbour sufficiently to enable them to keep it open by working only, say, four months in a year. In that case the plant, being the only one of its kind in New Zealand, would readily get jobs all over the Dominion, because there is no plant of the kind here. That is entirely a question of river-dredging. The bar is being dealt with to a certain extent. You can see that the constant flow of detritus down the river is putting more work on the bar-dredger. A further bucket dredger for the bar in pre-war times would have cost another £65,000.

Dr. Hight : What is the biggest collier that the bar will take through now?—That is a matter for the Harbourmaster to judge. It is his personal business to say which vessels he will allow through. I only provide the water. I suppose it is one of the most difficult bars in the world to deal with.

Mr. McDonald : Your contention is that unless the authorities, who in this case are the Harbour Board and the Government combined, immediately take steps to provide additional facilities for dredging the river there is a serious danger of the coal trade of Westport being throttled, and that even if steps were taken now it would be two or three years before any effect was felt?—That is my meaning, and therefore this matter should be represented to the Government in connection with the coal-supply of the Dominion. A new bucket dredger such as I have indicated would deal adequately and efficiently with all the necessities of this harbour for the next thirty-five years.