

- (13.) The improvement of the navigation of the Waikato River and its tributaries, the effect on such rivers and on the adjacent swamp lands of the improvement works proposed or already executed by the Waikato River Board, and generally as to the navigation of those rivers ;
- (14.) Whether a bridge should be constructed across Waitemata Harbour connect the City of Auckland with the northern districts ;

and generally to inquire into and report upon such other matters as might come under our notice in the course of our inquiries, and which we considered required to be investigated in connection therewith.

INVESTIGATIONS.

Your Commissioners met in Wellington on the 4th and 5th March, and inspected the files and data that had been collected for them by the Secretary, Mr. A. E. Briggs, and interviewed some of the departmental Heads with a view to obtaining information as to the data available for the inquiry. The Commission held its first public meeting in Auckland on the 4th April, and spent the time between that day and the 5th May in taking evidence and in visiting various localities. Public meetings were held in Auckland, Mercer, Ngaruawahia, Hamilton, Pirongia, Cambridge, Waiuku, Helensville, and Onehunga, and, in addition, the Commission visited the routes of the suggested canals and works, and the navigable portions of the Waikato and its tributaries.

Evidence was tendered by 126 witnesses, but it was upon the whole incomplete and unsatisfactory, and it was clear that the interest in, and the enthusiasm for, the question of inland waterways on a large scale in the Auckland District that existed some years ago had greatly decreased. Beyond general statements as to the advantages to be gained by waterway communication, there were few or no statistics furnished (except in respect to part of the trade or suggested trade on the Waikato River) with the intent of proving that such schemes might be commercially successful. Promises to prepare and furnish statistics to the Commission were made, but have not been adequately fulfilled, and the motive underlying a great deal of the evidence given was undoubtedly (a) a desire to have public moneys spent in the various districts, irrespective of whether the schemes proposed were likely to be commercially successful or not, and (b) a feeling that if water communication existed the dealings of the Railway Department with the public might be placed on a different and more satisfactory footing through the passing-away of a monopoly of transit.

A copy of the evidence that was taken upon oath is attached hereto [not printed], but in addition there was necessarily a large amount of information obtained from individuals met by the members of the Commission in the course of the inquiry which could not be placed upon record. A list of the witnesses and of the places at which they gave evidence is prefixed to the evidence and forms an index thereto.

As the question of the navigation of the Waihou River had been dealt with and reported upon by a Royal Commission so recently as in December, 1920, we did not deem it to be necessary to sit at Thames or to deal in any way with that river.

The Commission restricted itself to inquiries as to proposed canals (a) between the Waitemata Harbour and the Kaipara Harbour at Helensville ; (b) between the Waitemata and the Manukau Harbours by alternative routes known as the Whau and Tamaki routes ; (c) between the Manukau Harbour and the River Waikato ; (d) between the Waikato River and the Thames Gulf, through the Mangawara Creek and the Piako River. The Commission also inquired into the navigation and possible canalization or improvement of the Waikato River and its tributary creeks, and as to the effect of the works carried out by the Waikato River Board ; also into the question of the connection of the northern and southern sides of the Waitemata Harbour by means of a bridge.

The Commission met finally in Wellington from the 10th August to the 15th idem to take further evidence and to consider the detailed investigations of a technical character that had been made by the two engineering members of the Commission, and to consider the terms of the report.