

the season 1920–21. Co-relative prices were fixed for flour, bran, pollard, and bread. The purchase, sale, and distribution of wheat is conducted by the Government through the agency of the Wheat-control Office at Christchurch.

COAL-CONTROL.

In consequence of largely increased importations from overseas during the year under review it has been possible to make larger allocations to public services, industries, and trade generally, and also to build up reserve stocks.

The organization set up under the Coal-trade Regulations, 1917, enabled the best possible distribution of available supplies to be made in the national interests, and in addition has adequately protected the interests of all consumers of coal.

The total output of the Dominion mines for the year amounted to 1,843,705 tons, as against 1,847,848 tons for 1919, a decrease of 4,143 tons. Importations reached a total of 647,077 tons as compared with 455,494 tons imported last year—an increase of 191,583 tons.

In order to supplement local and Australian supplies the Railway Department arranged for a considerable quantity of coal from other sources, and this has permitted larger allocations to be made for essential industries and other public services.

The following table shows the output of bituminous and semi-bituminous coal from 1914 to 1920 inclusive, also importations for the same period :—

Year.				New Zealand Mines. Tons.	Importations. Tons.
1914	..	..	..	1,494,315	518,070
1915	..	..	..	1,404,400	353,471
1916	..	..	..	1,422,074	293,956
1917	..	..	..	1,247,989	291,597
1918	..	..	..	1,122,308	255,332
1919	..	..	..	961,107	455,494
1920	..	..	..	923,575	647,077

The falling-off in output (as shown above) for last year when compared with the previous year amounted to 37,532 tons, but it will be observed that there has been a steady decline from 1914 onwards, with the exception of the year 1916, which showed an increase of 17,674 tons over the preceding year.

The figures for the current year show an improvement in the production of bituminous coal, and if work continues uninterruptedly at the various mines on the West Coast the Dominion in the near future will be less dependent on outside sources of supply.

About July last the Commonwealth authorities, in view of the prevailing shortage of coal in the principal States, inaugurated a system of control over the export of Maitland coals from Newcastle. Inter-State shipping under this system received first preference, New Zealand and foreign vessels ranking next in order for permits. As the Dominion depends largely on regular supplies of Maitland coal for maintaining railway services, gasworks, and other essential industries, this restriction seriously affected the supply and resulted in delaying vessels engaged in the Newcastle–New Zealand trade, in some cases for periods varying from six to eight weeks.

Frequent representations have been made to the Commonwealth authorities to treat New Zealand vessels on a parity with inter-State shipping, but without securing any modification in our favour. However, further negotiations are in progress, which may lead to some improvement.

I have been very glad to notice that our coal-mines are practically all at work, and that a very fine spirit prevails among our miners, who are anxious to supply New Zealand industries and homes with New Zealand coal. In a very short time the contracts which have been made for the supply of coal from other countries will have come to an end, and I trust we shall then be producing enough for our requirements.