

APPENDIX TO REPORT OF WASTE LANDS COMMITTEE ON PETITION OF
F. D. RICH AND W. H. WILLIAMS—*continued*.

Messrs. CHAPMAN and STRODE to the Hon. the MINISTER of MINES.

SIR,—

Dunedin, 28th February, 1884.

We have the honour, by instructions from the managing director of the Shag Point Coal Company (Limited), to inform you that the Shag Point Mine has ceased working, and to draw your attention to the following facts in connection with the suspension of operations:—

The mine has for some time past been worked in two different directions: one of the workings being under the sea, and the other under the mainland. On the 19th March, 1883, Mr. Binns, the Inspector of Mines for Otago, after inspecting the mine, informed Mr. Williams, the manager of the company, that, owing to the fact that water was percolating through the roof of the submarine workings, the miners must be withdrawn, and the working under the sea stopped. Mr. Williams accordingly stopped work in this part of the mine, and withdrew the men; but at the same time he requested Mr. Binns to allow the submarine workings to be kept dry by means of pumping, as he anticipated that the introduction of a large body of water into the submarine workings would not only tend to soften and destroy the roof, but that in course of time the water would rise sufficiently high in these workings to render those conducted on the mainland unsafe. This request was refused by Mr. Binns, who insisted upon Mr. Williams closing the submarine workings, and permitting the water to enter.

Mr. F. D. Rich, the managing director of the company, communicated Mr. Binns's instructions to yourself on the 5th July last, and asked that, before such an important step as the closing of the company's submarine working was taken, a Commission of experts should be appointed by the Government to determine upon the wisdom of the course forced upon the company. No Commission was however appointed, and the company had to submit to what was considered by the directors and others a fatal mistake on the part of the Inspector.

During the early part of the present month Mr. Binns again inspected the mine, and found that exactly what had been anticipated by the company had actually happened. The walls and roof, which were composed of shale and sandstone, had, owing to the rise of water, become loosened, and large blocks had fallen; and, in addition to this, the water was then rising in the submarine workings at such a rate as to make it apparent that in a very short time the land workings which were connected with the marine workings would be flooded. The pressure of water had by this time increased from 25lb. to 100lb. to the square inch, and the walls which previous to this were well able to sustain the pressure became unable to do so, and an inroad from the marine to the land workings was imminent.

On the 11th instant Mr. Binns wrote to the manager of the company, pointing out that the water had risen in the submarine workings, and to such an extent as to render the remaining workings quite unsafe, and requesting him to withdraw the whole of the miners from the pit. The men were accordingly withdrawn, and the mine was entirely closed.

We are instructed to point out that the casualty which had been anticipated by the manager, and which he had drawn the Inspector's special attention to in March, 1883, has actually occurred; and that it is due entirely to the fact that the company were forbidden to continue their pumping operations, and compelled to allow the water to rise in the submarine workings; and, further, that not only did the manager of the company and the managing director urge the strongest objections to the course insisted on by the Inspector, but the engineer whom the company called in at the time agreed with the company in this matter.

We may point out that the Inspector of Mines has almost unlimited power in deciding upon the mode of working coal mines, and that from his decision there is virtually no appeal; that, in the present instance, not only was the course insisted on by him most strongly objected to at the time, but that the very misfortune which has now happened to the company was predicted by the manager.

We have the honour, under the above circumstances, to request that you will allow the facts contained in our letter to be investigated by a Commission, consisting of competent persons, who may decide the question as to whether or not the submarine workings of the company should have been allowed to fill with water.

Should you consent to such a course being adopted, we have the honour to suggest that the Commission should be composed of three experts—one chosen by the Government, one by the Shag Point Coal Company, and a third by both of the persons nominated.

We are, &c.,

The Hon. the Minister of Mines, Wellington.

CHAPMAN and STRODE.

Messrs. CHAPMAN and STRODE to the Hon. the MINISTER of MINES.

SIR,—

Dunedin, 28th March, 1884.

We have the honour to request that, in referring to our former letter of the 28th February, you will allow us to correct a mistake which has occurred in it. We stated therein that "on the 19th March, 1883, Mr. Binns, the Inspector of Mines for Otago, after inspecting the mine, informed Mr. Williams that, owing to the fact that water was percolating through the roof of the submarine workings, the miners must be withdrawn." We understood at the time that this was the case, but we have since found that we were wrong. It was when Mr. Binns made his final inspection in February, 1884, and not in March, 1883, that he informed the Shag Point Company's directors that water was at that time percolating through the roof.

We understand that on the 19th March, 1883, there was no percolation of water through the roof at all, and that the only water coming into the mine was the ordinary leakage, and that this was quite fresh, showing that at that time no salt water had come through.

We have, &c.,

The Hon. the Minister of Mines, Wellington.

CHAPMAN and STRODE.