

While in Gisborne I had opportunities afforded me of visiting the various portions of the district, and hearing the views of the country settlers upon the matters about which I now report. I also visited the oil-springs, where I examined the bore upon the South Pacific lease, which lately struck oil at a depth of 1,320ft., and found oil standing in the pipe 6ft. below the surface of the ground. I visited the site of the proposed new bore upon the same lease, where the derrick and machinery are fixed in position; and also the Minerva Company's lease, where the bore had reached a depth of 765ft. since December last, and at which the oil-bearing stratum was expected to be tapped at a depth of about 1,100ft. A report has lately been made upon this oil-district by Mr. Gordon, Mining Engineer, which will undoubtedly give full particulars. I attended a meeting of the Harbour Board at their request, and heard the views of the members upon its position. I also received a deputation of residents who are dissatisfied with the present scheme, headed by Mr. W. L. Rees, and heard a full explanation of their opinions, supported by documents with which I was afterwards supplied.

Before commencing to report under the different heads into which my inquiry has been directed, I will shortly describe the measures adopted by the Board in order to determine and fix upon the plans and site, both before and after the commencement of the work.

Upon the 12th May, 1885, a petition was presented to the Board, signed by 200 residents, praying that the breakwater might be approached from the town side of the Turanganui River.

On the 13th October, 1885, the Engineer exhibited his sketch of proposed harbour works to the Board, and was instructed to proceed to Wellington at an early date, for the purpose of obtaining the approval of the Marine Department to the plans.

At a meeting of the Board on the 22nd December, 1885, the following resolution was passed: "That the alternative plan laid before the Board [Stony Point] this evening be forwarded to the Marine Department, and that the Government be requested to give its sanction to either plan approved at the earliest possible date."

Upon the 29th December, 1885, a telegram was received from the Minister, Marine Department, to the following effect: "Your Secretary's letter of the 24th instant received. Colonial Marine Engineer has examined sketch-plans referred to therein, and has recommended the Government to approve the first plan submitted, with slight modification marked thereon by him; and His Excellency will be advised accordingly at next meeting of Executive Council." The present approved plans, signed by the Governor in Council on the 29th December, 1885, were received by the Board from the Marine Department on the 11th January, 1886.

Upon the 29th October, 1886, the Board wrote to the Minister, Marine Department, intimating that, as their Engineer had prepared plans differing somewhat from Sir John Coode's, they sent their Engineer with them to Wellington; where he was informed that it would be unnecessary to consult Sir John on the matter, provided that the Minister was satisfied. These plans were left in Wellington, and ultimately approved by the Governor in Council. As it was some time before this was done, the Engineer prepared an alternative plan of a breakwater, now known as the "Stony Point plan." The department did not consider that this possessed advantages over the first, which had been authorised in December; and the Board, being satisfied with the scheme, began work at once, and have expended—at that date—about £20,000 on railway, plant, wharf, viaduct, and block-yard.

On the 14th September, upon the requisition of Mr. W. L. Rees and others, a public meeting was held to protest against the breakwater being built on the authorised site, and to advocate its construction at Stony Point. A committee was formed, with Mr. W. L. Rees as chairman, who waited on the Board and laid their views before them. The Board agreed to ask Messrs. Blackett, Goodall, and Napier Bell, with their own Engineer, Mr. John Thomson, to consult as to the best site for the breakwater; but, before doing so, decided to lay the matter before Mr. Blackett to see if he considered there were sufficient grounds for making the change, and instructed their Engineer to draw up a report stating the relative advantages of the two sites. This was laid before the Board at their meeting on the 12th October, while at the same meeting Mr. Rees's committee sent in a document formulating their views. Before submitting the latter to Government, the Board asked their Engineer to report to them on the "objections and suggestions." This was done in accordance with the following resolution of the Board: "That the report of the committee of the public meeting, and objections, be referred to the Engineer to consider and report thereon; and that the Engineer's report, along with the copy of objections, be forwarded to the Governor with a request that if sufficient cause be shown the Governor will sanction the reconsideration by a consulting engineer of the several schemes of a breakwater."

"I now enclose these three documents, with the object of asking if Mr. Blackett considers there are sufficient grounds for annulling the authorised plan in favour of Stony Point; and, if so, does he think it necessary to call in Messrs. Goodall and Bell?"

The reply received from the Marine Department in answer, dated 29th November, 1886, was as follows: "I have the honour, by direction of the Minister having charge of this department, to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 29th ultimo, submitting to the Government the proposal which has been made to the Board that the Gisborne breakwater should be constructed at Stony Point instead of at the site approved by the Governor in Council; and, in reply, I am to state that the Government, after having carefully considered the matter, see no reason for agreeing to the proposed change of site. With regard to the question as to the cost of the breakwater, I am to reiterate the statement made in letter from this department to the Board, No. 156/47, of the 9th of March last, that the responsibility of finding the funds to defray the whole cost of carrying out the plans will rest entirely on the Harbour Board, and in no manner with the Government."

The foregoing extracts from the correspondence will show that the Board used every endeavour to have the most suitable site fixed upon.

I will now shortly describe the various schemes that have been from time to time proposed.