

No direct resolution was proposed in reference to the New Zealand–Australian cable, but the following, on the subject of cable communication with Australasia generally, was carried: “That as all the Australasian Colonies are interested in the maintenance of cable communication with Great Britain, this Conference is of opinion that each of these colonies should contribute, in proportion to the extent of its population, to the subsidies now paid by the contracting colonies to the Eastern Extension Company, and that a like division of cost should be made between all the colonies represented at this Conference of the cables communicating with Tasmania and New Zealand; Great Britain to be requested to contribute towards the subsidy given to the Eastern Extension Company in respect of the cables connected with the traffic with the United Kingdom: Provided always that it is understood that the right to purchase the Australasian cables of the Eastern Extension Company is to be in the hands of the colonies who are now paying, or may consent to pay, the above subsidies in the manner provided, at any time upon giving the company the notice prescribed in the subsidy agreement.”

A resolution was also carried, in the following terms, approving of a survey of a route for a Pacific cable: “That this Conference is of opinion that it is desirable a survey should be made of a suitable route for an ocean telegraph cable by way of the Pacific *via* Vancouver Island, the cost of the survey to be defrayed by Great Britain, Canada, and the Australasian Colonies represented at this Conference: This, however, is not to bind any of the countries named to accept the proposals of the Pacific Cable Company, and that the subject of the resolution be communicated to the various Australasian Governments.”

The other questions more directly affecting New Zealand were—establishing an intercolonial parcel post, exchange of intercolonial postal notes, and an exchange of post cards with the United Kingdom.

The question of uniform postal and telegraph regulations was also discussed, and the matter referred to the heads of departments who were present at the Conference to draw up draft regulations for subsequent consideration of the several Governments. This was done.

The Trans-Pacific mail service question was referred to New South Wales and New Zealand for consideration.

The several questions dealt with by the Conference are now receiving consideration.

With respect to the survey of a route for a telegraph cable between Vancouver and Australia across the Pacific, H.M.S. “Egeria” has commenced a preliminary survey. The Pacific Cable Company, however, will need to take immediate steps for obtaining a complete survey if the Pacific cable is to be an accomplished fact within a reasonable limit of time.

As indicating the feeling of the Imperial Government on the Pacific cable question, the following is extracted from a letter dated the 4th of April last, from the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty to the Colonial Office, which has been forwarded in a despatch to His Excellency the Governor:—

“H.M.S. ‘Egeria’ is now on the point of sailing from Sydney to perform the important work of clearing up the dangers and fixing the positions of and surveying the islands on the route from New Zealand to Vancouver, a work which my Lords understood was strongly urged by Rear-Admiral Sir George Tryon on the representations of the colonies.

“In the course of this work the ‘Egeria’ has orders to obtain deep soundings which will in two or three years furnish more detailed information than now exists as to the varieties of depths to be expected on the general line of cable.

“To survey a route for a cable to any purpose would, however, entail long searching for the best line, examination of contours of coral islands, and continuous close sounding; and three years’ steady work at that and nothing else would probably not complete the survey.

“The operations on which the ‘Egeria’ is about to be employed will provide for work of immediate value to, and of urgent necessity in connection with, the commerce now springing up; and will also furnish gradually (at a minimum cost) the preliminary information required, and a great part of that directly bearing on the laying of a cable.

“My Lords do not therefore consider that it is advisable to make any alteration in the orders under which the ‘Egeria’ is about to act; and as no vessel can be spared from her hydrographic work in any other part of the world, the question of hastening the survey by providing another vessel must, in their Lordships’ opinion, remain open until Lord Knutsford is able to inform this department that there is a reasonable prospect that the funds for the construction of the submarine cable across the Pacific will be found, and that time is of importance in Imperial interests.

“In reply to the inquiry contained in the last part of your letter, my Lords desire me to state that the annual cost of H.M.S. ‘Egeria’ is about £12,000, and that if a similar vessel is provided especially for the purpose of making a complete survey of the best ocean route and landing-places the cost would be about £36,000. The foregoing estimate is irrespective of the value of the vessel and the cost of fitting her out.”

The following table and return give the number of offices and officers of all classes on the 31st December last:—