

an increase of 17 in the number of steamers, 991 in the tonnage, and 489 in the horse-power. For some years past the Board of Trade has only surveyed first-class steamers once a year; it would be desirable to adopt the same plan in this colony, but, before this can be done, the Shipping and Seamen's Act will have to be amended. Certificates of exemption under the provisions of section 201 of "The Shipping and Seamen's Act, 1877," and subsection (2) of "The Shipping and Seamen's Act 1877 Amendment Act, 1885," were issued during the year for the under-mentioned steamers: "Clyde," s.s., fishing-vessel, exempted from survey, and from carrying certificated master, mate, and engineer; "Alpha," New River dredger, exempted from employment of certificated master; "La Buona Ventura," exempted from employment of certificated engineer; "Rosina," exempted from employment of certificated master while trading in Poverty Bay without passengers; "Noko," s.s., exempted from employment of certificated master while trading in Poverty Bay without passengers. The reports of the Inspector of Machinery will be found at the end of this report. No complaints have been made as to the carrying-out of the duties by the Inspectors. Two or three claims to have the boilers considered as being of a less horse-power than estimated by the Inspectors only have been received, these being made in order that the fee payable might be reduced. It would be very desirable if some good rule could be determined on for fixing the horse-power of boilers, for the purpose of ascertaining the fee to be paid for inspection. The work in some districts has fallen somewhat in arrear, owing to the unfortunate illness of one of the Inspectors; but efforts are being made to pull up these arrears, although the quantity of work to be done makes it difficult to do so. Proceedings were taken against a man in Canterbury for deliberately continuing to work a boiler after a certificate had been refused by the Inspector, the result being that he was fined £10 and costs. An Order in Council, providing that dairy-factory boilers used not more than six months' in any year should only be inspected once in every two years, was made on the 17th March last.

*Wrecks and Casualties.*—The accompanying table shows an analysis of the casualties reported. Those on the coast of the colony number 54, representing tonnage amounting to 16,420 tons, as against 60 casualties, affecting 11,417 tons, in the previous year. There is a decrease in the number of total wrecks within the colony of 19 vessels, but an increase in the tonnage of 5,120 tons, as against 22 vessels of 2,676 aggregate tonnage in the previous year. There is also a decrease in the number of lives lost during the year, being 33, as against 62 in the previous year; those lost in the colony being 31, as against 45 last year. Of the lives lost on or near the coasts of the colony, 3 were lost in the "Reward," 4 in the s.s. "Boojum," 1 in the s.s. "Goahead," 6 in the s.s. "Sir Donald" (all hands), 2 in the "Clematis," 4 in the "Columbia" (all hands), 5 in the "Recamia" (all hands), 3 in the "Bessie," 1 in the "Pleione," 1 from the s.s. "Staffa," and 1 from the "Gleaner." Of those lost beyond the colony, 1 each was from the "Pleione" and the "Kirkdale." The number (14) lost in the wreck of the "Derry Castle," on Enderby Island, in the Auckland Group, in March of last year, while on her voyage from Melbourne to London, are not included in the returns, nor is that vessel included in our returns. The survivors (8) were rescued by the sealing-schooner "Awarua," and conveyed to Melbourne.

*FISHERIES.*—*Oysters:* During the year the close season for oysters in Coromandel has been still further extended until the 31st March, 1889. Proceeding have been taken successfully against persons taking rock-oysters in the close season. The question of the taking of the oyster which is stated to be a "shore" and "mangrove" oyster, and which scientific authorities and the department hold to be "rock-oyster," still remains unsettled; it would be most desirable to get this question decided. The whole question of the oyster-fisheries requires grave consideration; they are so valuable that no effort should be spared in order to preserve them from extermination. In connection with the export of mud-oysters the following extracts from a report on the oyster-fisheries of Maryland, made by the British Consul at Baltimore, may be interesting:—

"The Western States furnish the great market for the Chesapeake raw oyster, and there is hardly a city in that section which does not derive its supply from Baltimore. The raw oysters are so packed in ice as to remain fresh, in ordinary weather, from a week to ten days, though a sudden rise of temperature may render a whole week's supply unfit for consumption. To meet this difficulty, and obviate the loss and inconvenience which it occasions, the ingenuity of enterprising packers has been exercised to the utmost, and has resulted in the establishment of the American Patent Lock Oyster Company. Oysters cannot be preserved without a thorough knowledge of their habits. They feed twice in the day, and always at the still moment which precedes the turn of the tide; at no other time, except when feeding, do they open their shells. When taken out of their natural element, they attempt to feed at regular intervals, and, so soon as their shells open, the liquor which they contain is all lost, the air takes its place, and the oyster is covered with a thick coating of slime. This is the first stage of decomposition, after which the oyster becomes practically useless. As long as the shells are closed, the oyster is fit to eat; it feeds upon the liquor in the shell, and will keep thus in good condition for a considerable time; and a means by which they can be so maintained has long taxed the ingenuity of the packers. In 1884 a Mr. Freeman, of Philadelphia, despatched to Denver, in Colorado, some oysters with their shells fastened by means of the patent wire-spring Yankee clothes-pin. On their arrival they were found when opened to be in perfect condition. Mr. Freeman immediately set about devising some means for closing the shells in a less cumbrous manner. His plan is to fasten securely the oyster-shells with a stout wire; this is done by hand with a pair of pincers, and, as it can be effected very rapidly, vast quantities are so treated daily. The Patent Lock Oyster Company which Mr. Freeman has established on the shores of Chesapeake Bay has already despatched car-loads of oysters, so treated, to San Francisco and other western cities, and with the most satisfactory results. It is stated that some are even on their way to London. He is now completing arrangements to send, next season, consignments to Paris, Rome, and other cities; and, if the experiment proves as great a success as is anticipated, the American oyster will be eaten in its natural condition all over the civilised world."