

wrecks within the colony, 12 vessels, of 2,464 aggregate tonnage, being lost, as against 14 vessels, of 2,991 aggregate tonnage, in the previous year. There is again, also, a decrease in the number of lives lost during the year, being 25, as against 31 in the previous year; those lost in the colony being 15, as against 19 last year. Of the lives lost on or near the coasts of the colony, 2 were lost from the "Zillah," 2 in the s.s. "Maitai," 8 in the "Emilie," 1 from the "Enterprise," and 2 from the s.s. "Rotorua" (1 on two separate occasions, both suspected suicides); of those lost beyond the colony, 2 were lost from the "Otago," and 1 each from the "Circe," "Blair Drummond," "Devonport," "Cora," "Marlborough," "Invercargill," "Peri," and s.s. "Tongariro."

Of the miscellaneous casualties reported only two were of a serious character—viz., those to the "Otago" and the "Beltana." The former was badly damaged by heavy seas and lost two of her crew while on her voyage from Sydney to London, and put into Lyttelton to refit. The latter also put into Lyttelton, while on her voyage from Port Adelaide to London, her cargo of wool being on fire.

Wreckage of the "County of Carnarvon," a missing vessel, bound from Newcastle, New South Wales, to San Francisco, having been found washed ashore in Spirits Bay, the s.s. "Staffa," was despatched to search the Three Kings for castaways or any trace of wreckage; but nothing was found.

FISHERIES.—*Oysters*: The oyster-beds at Coromandel and in the Hauraki Gulf and Bay of Islands were opened at the beginning of the season. I desire again to draw attention to the desirability of legislating so as to preserve our oyster-beds, and more particularly the rock-oysters, from entire destruction. The facility that exists for taking the rock-oysters renders the process of their destruction comparatively an easy one. It would appear that one of the most feasible means of preserving the oysters would be to lease the beds, subject to strict conditions as to maintaining them in full bearing. At present the only practical way to preserve them is to close them entirely. This is effectual as long as it lasts; but, once the beds are opened they are rushed, and in a few months the benefit gained by keeping them closed for years is lost.

Imported Fish.—The fry of the salmon-ova referred to in last year's report were duly placed in the Aparima River, about 265,000 having been placed in that river last season, or about 474,000 in all since the first were liberated there in 1874. It is to be hoped that salmon have been established in this river, but nothing is certain as yet. As stated in last year's report, a sum of £150 has been paid to the fishermen at Riverton as compensation to them for having closed the river for all kinds of fishing. In order to allow the salmon to have every chance, it would be most desirable not to relax the prohibition against fishing in the Aparima or its branches until it is quite certain that the introduction of salmon is either a success or a failure. In the former case fishing should only be allowed under special regulations.

Seals.—The close season for seals was, on the 24th December last, extended until the 31st December next. In connection with the sealing question, the Imperial Government were asked to take the necessary steps to have the British flag hoisted and the Queen's sovereignty proclaimed over the Macquarie Islands, with the view of their being annexed to New Zealand. Authority was received from the Secretary of State for the Colonies to declare Her Majesty's sovereignty over them. The "Hinemoa" was about to be despatched to carry this into effect; but a communication was received from Tasmania to the effect that these islands were included in the jurisdiction of the Governor of that colony. Steps are being taken to have the jurisdiction transferred to New Zealand.

Inspection of Machinery.—An Order in Council was made authorising a discount of 25 per cent. on all fees (except the maximum fee) if paid within a month after the issue of the certificate. This came into force on the 1st January last, and has proved a relief to the owners of machinery, and a saving of trouble to the department, as the fees are now paid much more promptly. An additional Inspector was appointed in August last, and it is hoped that before long the arrears of inspection will be overtaken.

Returns.—The usual returns, and reports by Inspectors of Machinery, will be found appended hereto.

I have, &c.,

LEWIS H. B. WILSON,

Assistant-Secretary.

The Hon. the Minister having charge of the Marine Department, &c.